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THE
THREE CHANCES.

BY
THE AUTHORESS OF "THE FAIR CAREW."

You must speak louder, my Master is deaf.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE THREE CHANCES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THERE are certain maladies incident to the human frame, which have been always held available for the purposes of authorship, and made the vehicle of a vast amount of ingenious and poetical embellishment. In their selection and treatment they afford an unerring indication of the writers' individual tastes; some labouring to produce strong and startling effects, and revelling sternly in descriptions of mortal suffering, grappling with plague and pestilence, the gun-shot wound, and cholera in its "bluest" stages: their fevers end usually in delirium; and, when they touch on actual insanity, it is of that sort which leads direct to the strait-waistcoat and the padded chamber.

Others again, more feminine in sex or style, are often found working industriously with the milder elements of physical evil; their province it is to trace the progress of diseases strictly decorous, such as may be safely paraded in the best society, and can never offend the gentle reader by hurrying him unawares into low com-

pany, or scenes of questionable excitement. Authors of this stamp eschew the surgeon's knife as carefully as a lamb would that of the butcher, and content themselves and their readers with following in the wake of the family physician; whether death or recovery is to be their culminating point of interest, still they set the sick-room in order, and smooth the pillow of their patient, and tuck him up in bed with a grace and discretion not to be surpassed by any damsel in high latitudes.

But, under whatever aspect these descriptions are introduced, they are evidently written with peculiar zest; and hence it results that few symptoms of the favourite malady are spared us—not one howl of the author's mad hero, nor the weakest cough of the authoress's consumptive one. Nor can it be denied that the writers of either class find justification as well as reward for their labours, in the favour with which these are generally received: no description seeming too minute for a sympathizing public, no dialogue too laboured or too long.

Encouraged by these evidences of success, therefore, I do not hesitate to follow in some measure the example set before me by so many of my contemporaries; though conscious that the theme I am attempting to illustrate is far from being popular with either writer or reader. Excellently as it has been described in Dr. Kitto's autobiography, and some years ago in the lively fiction of Wilkie Collins, neither the force of truth in the one case, nor the talent of the novelist in the other, has yet succeeded in investing the subject of Deafness with any great share of sentimental regard; and while

the world mingles a sort of reverence with its pity for the victim of Blindness, whose woes have been dwelt upon in many a poem and pathetic page, those of the sister malady remain comparatively uncelebrated and unsung.

For an explanation of this seeming contradiction, it may be supposed that, as the disadvantages of the deaf refer chiefly to the intellect, they make a less direct appeal to our sensibility than those which are at once encountered and apprehended by the eye. With our own sensual organ we perceive the discomforts of him who is deprived of the great power of sight, but we can estimate the loss of hearing only by an effort of the imagination.

I cannot tell whether these reflections would have occurred to me with equal force, had I never become acquainted with the person whose adventures I am undertaking to record; but I think there were few who could look upon Mr. Frere without entering, for his sake, into a deeper consideration of the calamity which constituted the great trial of his existence.

At the time I was first introduced to this gentleman, his troubles had already overtaken him; but I was told what he had been before the bolt was launched which had buried itself in his inmost heart—how perfect his prosperity had seemed to be! how rich he had been in all the gifts of Nature, and all that the world has to bestow!

Young, wealthy, and well-born, with a fine person, a mind highly cultivated, and manners that captivated all

who approached him, there seemed but one thing requisite to his felicity on earth, and even this was granted him, in the attachment of one of the loveliest and most charming of women ; a few weeks only were wanting to the period of his marriage with this lady, when Mr. Frere was struck with a sudden and almost total loss of hearing.

How greatly his affliction was heightened by the engagement which he had regarded as the crowning-point of his auspicious career, might be traced in many of the letters written by him at this period ; and, as I am aware that the contents of these must afford the best index of his feelings, and form a fitter introduction to his history than any dry detail that I could supply, I will here subjoin that portion of his correspondence which occurred while he was yet a stranger to me. These letters are addressed to the Rev. Richard Cranston, Mr. Frere's most confidential friend.

“ You reproach me with my unusual silence, and say truly that, from the commencement of our intimacy until now, so long an interruption has never occurred in a correspondence almost feminine in its minuteness and regularity. I would that I could attribute my seeming negligence to any of the frivolous causes you allege for it—but unhappily I have a more valid excuse. Far otherwise has my time of late been occupied than at balls or theatres—‘playing Strephon to the fairest of Phillises’—so runs your reading of the riddle ; or in ‘choosing furniture of the most approved modern-

antique, to trick out the rooms of the old house, and form a fitting bower for my Beauty.' Oh, Cranston, what a vision of happiness you bring before me in those few words, and how unlike to it is the frightful reality! I wish—I cannot help wishing—that you were already acquainted with what has befallen me; it was this that delayed my writing—the hope that, in the first instance, you might hear of it from any one rather than myself, so that you might be prepared for the wretched details I have to give; for I cannot tell from what weakness it arises, but I can hardly overcome my repugnance to entering upon the subject, even to you. It must be told, however, and now the sooner the better. I suppose the victims of every human calamity say the same; but it seems to me I could have borne with more firmness the amount of my affliction had it been laid upon me in any other possible form—the entire loss of fortune, for instance, or the infliction of bodily torture, however hopeless and excruciating. Misfortunes such as these seem tangible—they are evils to be wrestled with, and manfully resisted; there is sympathy in every honest heart for the bold and energetic, who go forth to battle with the world at large, with nothing beside their trust in Heaven, and their own indomitable spirit to help them. And then for all physical ills, why, the greater the suffering of our mortal frame, so much the nearer stands the Angel of Death beside the bed of torment. Rebuke me not—not yet at least—for these repinings; in time I hope to be more resigned, but now I declare to you I would rather be a leper than the thing I am

become—better to be openly shunned and driven from the haunts of men, than remain amongst them, the object of their forced toleration and secret annoyance.

“Do you remember a conversation which occurred (and a singular coincidence it was!) the very last time we met in London, in which we were instituting a comparison between the Blind and the Deaf? Most of the company—(it was at the Torringtons, and the party a large one)—were warmly advocating the loss of hearing rather than sight; the men especially were unanimous in preferring any bereavement which left them freedom of movement and action, to one which should render them grateful for the guidance of even a child or a dog.

“I alone attempted to maintain an opposite opinion, though sensible to a sort of shame in doing so; for it seemed almost like decrying that attribute of independence which, amongst the very tamest and meekest of our sex, is held to be something inestimable. But oh, Richard, in what a spirit of thoughtless levity, as I now feel, did we discuss and illustrate a subject so infinitely important to hundreds and thousands of the human race! You, I recollect, were particularly brilliant in the raillery with which you assailed me; for, in a mere trial of wit, such as this dispute very soon became, it is always the most intimate friend that hits you the hardest blow.

“But, though I might be silenced by numbers, my opinion remained unshaken; for it was a lifelong sentiment not to be affected by ridicule, or the trite arguments of any that were assembled there.

“From my very childhood, I have entertained a horror

of deafness. To such a degree have I feared and loathed it that I begin to apprehend there must have been sin in the thought—the arrogance of a spirit pampered into pride and impatience by a course of almost uninterrupted prosperity; what else could have engendered this morbid disgust at an infirmity to which so many better than myself are subjected? and, if so, it is a just sentence which dooms me to bear the very burthen I abominated. For, Cranston, it has fallen upon me in all its awful weight—Deafness entire, and by human means pronounced incurable!

“From the earliest indication of the disorder I had a full presentiment of what was eventually to be my lot; and it was to satisfy others rather than myself, and to avoid the reproach of a senseless fatalism, that I submitted to the experiments of the surgeon and aurists, and tried every means of relief. To you, my friend, I may add that these efforts were accompanied by supplications for a higher assistance, such as those only who are in fear of the frightfullest punishments can pour forth. But utterly vain have been all endeavours to remove or even lighten the curse. It clings to me, and will continue to do so to the end of existence. From henceforth I am utterly cut off from holding free communion with my fellow mortals. Never again, Richard, shall I hear your pleasant voice! Never—never more will the sound of *her's* bless me with its enchanting melody!

“I thought I had nerved myself to this recital, but can carry it no further to-day. Having acquainted you with the worst of my miserable story, I would indeed willingly

stop here, for it is a subject that affords little scope for the egotism of letter-writing—it is a torment, and no indulgence, to enter into the humiliating details; but I know you would not rest contented with a cursory notice of what affects me so nearly.

“For you, then, my best and truest friend—my trustiest confident, my wisest counsellor—for your sake I will rouse myself from the apathy of despair, and recount what happened to me from the moment I was struck, from the time when I walked as an equal amongst my fellow-creatures until this hour of blank annihilation. Bear with me, Cranston, if I appear to feel my infliction too acutely, and, till to-morrow, farewell.—Ever yours,

“MANLEY FRERE.”

Letter Second.

“AND now, my dearest Cranston, I begin writing in a fitter frame of mind than when I despatched my letter of yesterday. Shall I tell you why I am strengthened for the task? for it is not altogether because my senses are invigorated by a night's rest, though repose has doubtless its renovating influence even on me. But the truth is, that as yet my dreams partake more of the past than the present. In sleep I seem still to hear; and so from the moment of my waking, till that which forces me into contact with others, the blessed impression continues to predominate; and though I know it all the while to be a delusion, yet, weak as I am, the falsehood

soothes and cheers me ! Even this poor comfort must soon be over : my very dreams will partake of my real condition, and I shall see the visionary things of night gliding like noiseless phantoms about my path : even in sleep I shall be vainly watching the motion of their lips, or the progress made by their pen, as it travels over the cold insensible paper, which is destined henceforth to constitute my best and quickest mode of communicating with the minds around me. And so the sweet slumber which is coveted and prized by all other unfortunates, will ere long become embittered to me. Better, then, to be Kehama's victim, who never slept at all !

“ You will ask me where is the firmer spirit in which I professed to resume the narrative of what has befallen me ? Let me, before I proceed with it, assure you that the effeminate complaints I suffer myself to pour out in the interchange of our unreserved confidence, are strictly confined to yourself. Once, and but once besides, have I given utterance to the agony of my affliction—you may well guess to whom that letter was addressed. Afterwards my conscience smote me for having racked her feelings by dwelling too forcibly on my own ; but it would surely have been something monstrous and unnatural to have affected the least shadow of concealment from one who was to have been my second self ; and in fact, knowing the depth of my affection for her, would she have been deceived by any false and laboured expressions of resignation ? Besides, though at present our sorrows seem almost equally shared, she may and must recover : it is not in the nature of things that her

regret should continue unmitigated ; for me there is no relief ! Therefore it was that, in the selfishness of my despair, I indulged myself in this cruel solace ; and all the while I was taking a wretched sort of satisfaction in aggravating her grief, I secretly writhed under the conviction that that grief must one day cease. I knew I was acting a fiendish part, yet still persisted, alleging that it was the first and only time in the course of our engagement that I could charge myself with having given her voluntarily one uneasy moment. They say my letter half killed her ; for up to that time she had cherished hopes of my recovery. Yet even then I could not repent having sent it. I suppose from that my nature is brutalized already. Heaven knows what strange anomalous thing I am destined to become ; for, while I feel not the smallest temptation to amuse the world at large with the history of my sufferings, or to babble of them to the lukewarm and indifferent, what am I doing but seeking to harrow the hearts of the two beings I hold dearest in all the world—Barbara and you ? If I spared not *her*, I am little likely to respect *your* feelings ; so, if you are to have my story, you must even take it with all its saddest additions.

“ It was but a few days after that conversation at the Torringtons, that I grew sensible of a slight difficulty of hearing ; but I imputed it to a cold, and took little heed to the symptoms. Not even when these became manifested more decidedly, and the low murmuring in my ears, which pursued me night and day, swelled to a rushing noise, which one might liken to the waves of some

mighty ocean afar off, foaming, and chafing, and gaining by degrees on some frail object which it was fated to overwhelm and utterly destroy ; but I could not remain much longer ignorant of what was brooding over me. I awoke one morning without these distressing noises, and, pleased with the sudden relief, I lay for a minute or two in luxurious enjoyment of my calm condition. But it was time to arise, and I looked at my watch. It pointed to the hour of rising, but I said to myself it must be later still, for the watch had evidently stopped : it ticked no longer—twice I put it to my ear, and lo ! the thing was dumb. Fool that I was ! I remember now feeling a sort of pity for the old companion which up till then had served me so faithfully, and which I concluded to be at last wearing out.

“ What could I do better at that early hour, the herald of a busy day approaching, than meditate on the first incident it had brought me in its progress—try what could be made of even so trivial a subject, and ‘ improve the occasion,’ as they say in the language of cant ? So I thought how often I had consulted those bright little hands, in joy and in sorrow, in hope or anxiety—sometimes wondering to see how fast the minutes were flying ; at others, chiding them that they went no faster ; and many a light and laughing fancy twined in and out amongst thoughts of a graver and more solemn character.

“ Then, remembering that this watch had been my father’s gift, I resolved that, though I must have a new one, I never would part with the old. It should be stored

with many another memorial of his affection for his only child, and be carefully put by. Some day hence, perhaps (for thus high grew my presumption), it might be brought out to shew to some round-faced, ringleted cherub, sitting on my knee, and he or she be told that that had been 'dear grandpapa's own watch,' and many a little story of him be related, such as might suit their young intellect, and interest their feelings. And thus would I cause the memory of the good old man to be hallowed in the hearts of his innocent descendants. How long these fancies engaged me I hardly know; but, when I looked at the watch again, the time was altered, the hands had moved some degrees forward upon the dial—'I had condemned my old friend, then, too soon; it must be going still.' Once more I listened for its voice, but listened all in vain; and then the truth burst upon me at once—I was deaf—utterly deaf!

"I have told you that, from the time my infirmity became apparent, I lost all hope—yet it was not altogether so. I did indeed fall back upon my pillow confounded, as I well might be—lost in the intensity of my horror; but then I started up, refusing to believe the fact, and wildly repeating every experiment that might belie it—though the failure of each impelled me to the verge of desperation. I seized a chair and flung it violently on the floor; it fell as if on velvet. I clapped my hands—I spoke—I shouted. A strange vibration accompanied my actions, but neither word nor cry was audible. As hope forsook me, I grew more earnest for the full conviction which was to rob me of every human

solace. I flew to the window, pushed back its creaking lattice (it creaked no longer now!)—the morning was bright and beautiful, but its silence seemed that of the tomb. The gardener was rolling the gravel under my window, and another man who mowed the lawn was whetting his scythe; but they seemed to work on in dumb shew, not one dear sound of rural life reached me where I stood. The birds I had been used to feed from that window came fluttering about it—I knew they must be chirping as usual; and further off, on a bough of the old pear-tree, there sat the thrush for whose morning song I had often left the lattice open, that it might be the first thing I should hear. I watched now with straining eyes the motion of his open bill and quivering throat, but the delicious notes with which I saw he greeted me, were never more to rejoice my benumbed senses.

“I spare you any minute account of what followed this fearful discovery—how, though not without effort, I mixed with the family (it was at the Fieldings I was staying), and had to encounter their wonder and mute questioning, for so it seemed to me—their pity and advice; seeing them moving about more like the figures of a magic lantern than creatures of flesh and blood. The only course to be taken was to set off immediately to London for surgical advice; but, though I was eager for change, wherever I went the same unbroken silence still of course prevailed, to shock me with its unnatural strangeness. For be assured that, as long as we are blessed with the power of hearing, how profound soever our sense of solitude and silence may seem to be, it is a

perception totally distinct from that which encompasses the deaf. Not a sound may seem to you to penetrate your darkened chamber—the wind may be hushed without—the crackling fire be quenched upon your hearth ; yet the mere movement of your finger, the very emission of your breath, is enough to draw the broad line of separation between your case and mine—a distinction as complete as that which exists between the sleeper and the dead.

“I would gladly have made this journey alone ; but the Fieldings, both John and William, insisted on accompanying me. It was a trial wellnigh beyond my strength to have to play the part which propriety assigned me—that of the calm, resigned, and even hopeful patient, lending a courteous attention to signs and demonstrations which could only be guessed at. I need not tell you whose image mingled in every new phase of my wretchedness—trust me, Cranston, my regrets were never wholly selfish. *I* knew the worst that could befall me ; but Barbara, still ignorant and happy, what would be *her* anguish when the news reached her ! I wish now she had been with me at Dornton ; but the original arrangement, which would have kept us together almost till the wedding-day, had been, as I think you know, prevented by her mother’s sudden illness, which recalled her to Norfolk a fortnight ago. Thus it was agreed we were not to meet again till a few days before the ceremony. You see how calm I am become. I can write this word with a regular pulse and a firm hand ; and yet your own honourable nature must assure you, that

when it was made certain that my recovery was hopeless, and every surgeon of eminence had given up the case as incurable, I never for an instant contemplated exacting from her the fulfilment of a contract formed under such very different auspices. As long as there lingered a shadow of hope, or one clever aurist remained unconsulted, I would not suffer her to be told of what was hanging over us. In this reserve I acknowledge myself to have been wrong; its outward excuse was an anxiety to preserve my darling from what—if Heaven had proved merciful to us—would have caused her but useless alarm; but, besides this, I am now conscious there was a feeling on my part which ought never to have occurred between us. Whatever I may experience with respect to ordinary society, towards her—my true-hearted love—I ought not to have harboured the false pride which makes me—I confess it—ashamed of the kind of affliction with which the Almighty in his infinite wisdom has seen fit to chastise me. But so it was—I can perceive it plainly now. Wonder at me—blame me if you will, for I deserve your censure; but my very soul revolted from letting her know that the man she had honoured with her choice, was deprived for life of one of the finest faculties of his nature—that in sober truth I was no longer the being she *had* chosen—that there was scarcely one of her acquaintance who would not make her a more fitting companion than the Manley Frere whose quickness of intellect and facility of comprehending her softest accent had, as I well knew, formed his chief merit in her eyes.

“Therefore it is that at certain seasons—and especially when selfishness gets the upper hand—I half repent that she was not earlier informed of this calamity: Had she been at Dornton when it happened, and in constant association with me, who knows in what light her heavenly nature might not have induced her to regard an event which, to common minds, must seem the destruction of all conjugal happiness? But I must be careful how I dwell on that idea, or allow myself to contemplate such a sacrifice as her becoming my wife—it must not, ought not to be! The more acutely I feel the disadvantages inseparable to my altered condition, the firmer ought to be my determination to save her from the misery of sharing them. Richard, would it not be barbarous to sacrifice the gay enjoyment of her youth to the chilling void of such a companionship as mine has now become? Her bright intellect to be wasted upon a wretch unable to seize the precious thought as it flows from her lips, who cannot even guess it till it is forced upon his clouded faculties by signs and written words, and to whom every lively and pleasant fancy must be chilled and mangled before it can be transmitted? and this for Barbara, of all women, who, quick and brilliant as she is herself, prizes beyond every endowment that of a ready comprehension in others.

“How many an evidence of this (which, but for my altered circumstances, would have passed unregarded) now rises to distract me, by evincing beyond a doubt how little we are fitted to live together—her acute per-

ception of any thing like dulness in those who conversed with her; her horror of the Grants and the Flemings, and the whole family at the Grove; and her impatience of poor Erskine, who never can be made to comprehend a joke till every body else has grown tired of it—in short, her studied avoidance of a ‘bore’ in any shape! I have often heard her mother blame her for what she called her too fastidious taste, and rightly perhaps did she name it. While I, presumptuous wretch! upheld the uncharitable doctrine, and employed all my sophistry in her defence, to prove that ‘like should dwell with like,’ and that it was best, for so I argued (and though it passed for a jest, and a playful exaggeration, I fear my stubborn heart dictated the unfeeling sentiment,) it was better for the dull to herd together, than that they should engross the time and attention of their superiors in intelligence. Am I not justly punished for all this? But she, my sweet confederate—gentle and kind in the midst of all her pretty satire—*she* must not be made answerable for a few playful words, or be doomed to pay the heavy penalty which a lifelong union with me would ensure her.

“And yet, Cranston—for I will own all my weakness to you—though convinced of the reasonableness of what I have just written, and while I repeat it to myself continually, and add a hundred arguments for the propriety of our separation, I am still selfish enough to shudder at the prospect. I would not lift a finger to ratify the engagement; but you cannot conceive the dread with which I look forward to its final rupture. I have, I

trust, not ill fulfilled the duty incumbent on me. I have restored her freedom, the troth she plighted me in happier hours ; and have laid before her, as honestly and forcibly as possible, the reasons which justify her renouncing me ; and now nothing remains but to await her decision as resignedly as I can. But a wild thought still crosses and tempts me—women are so self-denying, and their love, if not so passionate as our's, is proverbially so much more generous in its nature. What, if resisting all the rational and worldly motives that may be urged, she were to refuse to give me up, and persist in clinging to this lost one—this ruin of a man ? Only to you, my friend, would I breathe a whisper of this, yet it haunts me like—no, not like my shadow—that cold undefined thing which is trembling on the wall while every thing about it is radiant with sunshine ; the hope, faint as it is, floats around me like an angel of light ! I picture her, in the boundless charity of her love, flying to my side to console and reassure me, vowing that no mortal tribulation shall suffice to tear us asunder. Ah, how different would my lot then be from the dreary future over which I am now shuddering ! I see her presiding in my home, the dispenser of every consolation vouchsafed to me. I see her moving about the house with her own unequalled grace, her step as light as ever, her eyes as bright, and those dear eyes still turning on me with unwearied affection. She sits at the head of my table, shedding joy and gladness on the guests who are gathered round it, for then I should not need the hermit-life I have been planning ; it would be my pride to behold her filling, as

it were, the place of both of us, the promoter of every hospitable duty and cheerful diversion. I, too, might sit there unable to hear a word that was spoken, but no churlish repining would then arise ; I should be satisfied in the reflection of the happy faces assembled round me, and the mortifications which now perpetually ruffle my temper, and make me at the same time despise myself for being so moved, would little annoy me, so long as I watched that beaming countenance, and saw in it the blessed assurance that, with all my infirmities, I was still her dearest—first consideration upon earth ! And then, Cranston—to vary this picture of Love's own sketching—my darling comes before me in a holier character, as the dispenser of my charities, the enlightened medium through which my half-benighted faculties would be awakened and informed. Without this sweet influence prevailing, I might, perhaps, grow suspicious and unjust—always dreading to be imposed on, and mistrusting those who best deserved my confidence. Not so if Barbara were there fulfilling each household duty—the impartial mistress of my servants—the ready protectress of the oppressed—perhaps the mother as well as the wife and mistress—leading my children, through the strength of her own devotion, to cherish their half-helpless father, till, imitating her sweet ways, they would learn in their turn to communicate with me ; I might never hear their innocent voices, but a smile, a touch from those dear ones would suffice, and ere long we might comprehend each other as quickly and as well as those who have each the full command of their senses.

“Am I wholly inexcusable in indulging such dreams as these? Before you can answer me, Cranston, the question will be set at rest. This morning I expected to have had her decision—to-morrow it must arrive. Still, unaccustomed to this dreadful deprivation, I was silly enough to listen for the postman’s knock, as I had done so often when expecting a letter from her. Then remembering that sight not sound was all I had henceforth to trust to, I threw my window open and watched for his approach, sickening with suspense as he passed beneath it; for he did go by, and the reprieve rejoiced me! Another day at least was rescued from the certainty of desolation. I might be disturbed with vain fancies, and doubts that are akin to despair; but what are the worst of these compared to the extinction of every feeble hope that now supports me?”

“If I have news to send you—good, blessed news—you shall hear by the next post. Should no letter reach you, my dear Cranston, you must guess my fate; I shall have no heart to tell it.”

CHAPTER II.

TREATING OF AN OLD-FASHIONED THEME.

THE writer of this melancholy letter did not over-estimate the intense interest with which it would be read. Between Manley Frere and Richard Cranston there subsisted a friendship of long standing, and no ordinary character. The society of the wealthy and well-born Frere had been sought by many a one who, in outward circumstances, seemed as likely to ensure a permanent regard as the companion of his choice; but while most of these school or college acquaintanceships had dwindled to indifference, or been extinguished altogether, the intimacy between these two young men held on its steady course, warm and unchanged; absence only strengthened its growth—time did but perfect it.

So secret and subtle are the influences which govern all human partialities, that in our desire to assign an appropriate reason for them, we are often driven to attribute their apparent singularity to causes the most improbable and inefficient; and such I take to be the vulgar assumption, so often repeated as an established fact, that persons are mostly attracted to each other by a

striking opposition in taste, opinion, or pursuit. In many parts of their character such violent contrasts may be observable; yet it is not from any of these that the friendship really springs, but from some point of similitude which, being less open to observation, is lying unsuspected. This hidden likeness it is, and no mysterious affinity of opposite sentiments, which seals the bond of union, and constitutes the friend or the lover for life.

And here I would say a word more on this hackneyed theme of friendship; not of the source from which it emanates, for there I might meet universal contradiction, but in celebration of its great worth and singularity, a point whereupon the world must surely be agreed. There is something, then, so sacred in the name, so noble in its abstract idea, and so tender in the images of disinterested elevation which it calls up, that even the sternest of us will be found to entertain a sort of indulgence for all old acquaintanceships, let their origin have been what they may. We occasionally see men growing grey together in a course of daily intimacy, which has really nothing in it which ought to engage our sympathies, or command one sensation of respect, and yet to a certain point our feelings go with them.

Look at those two money-getting old men, who are tottering towards the grave together; a strong suspicion of roguery has clung to them all their lives, insomuch that you feel pretty certain, as you pass them by the wayside, that the chuckling whisper and asthmatic laugh which accompanies their confidential chat, has reference

to some reminiscence of past days, illustrating the skill with which, when they possessed strength and opportunity for the feat, they contrived to overreach—perhaps to ruin—their neighbour.

Such may be your impression as you regard them, and still you find yourself looking with a kind of complacency upon the old fellows, who have stuck so fast together through the manifold vicissitudes of life, and involuntarily give them credit for more virtue than they could ever have laid claim to.

It must be for its rarity that we are led to respect what in itself is so little estimable—the durability rather than the nature of the fellowship; for it is certain that, when we observe two *young* men associating day by day, their duality in idleness or vice excites no particular interest or indulgence. But let these same good-for-nothing men grow grey in each other's company, and still be seen clinging together as brothers—based though the attachment may be on some of the most exceptionable features of their character—we allow it to pass as a specimen of what, for lack of a fitter term, we are constrained to denominate “friendship.” Fidelity in a mongrel form, but still fidelity. Other men, as empty-headed or unprincipled as themselves, have often joined company with them, yet these two alone remain firm in their alliance.

Ill enough does it speak for humanity in general, that we should be found ready to welcome this principle of faithfulness even in its most degraded state, simply because it is so scarce a quality. For there can be no

doubt, that if every old rogue of a merchant or stock-jobber had a prototype constantly to bear him company, and every hoary gambler and withered beau who lounges up St. James's Street had an Achates of precisely the same stamp inseparably linked to his side, we should acquire but an increased aversion to each individual; but the virtue of stability being so uncommon, we seize upon it, adulterated though it may be, to invest it with a faint gilding, the far-off reflection of something divine, and—as regardless of truth as consistency—give it the desecrated name of “friendship,” and salute it with some portion of applause.

And if, in even this degraded form, the power which is capable of assimilating two immortal souls engages some reluctant sympathy, how should we not respect it when it shines forth in the union of such men as Cranston and Frere! A friendship springing from congeniality in all the highest qualities of humanity; a brotherhood not in idle pursuit, low craft, or grovelling tendencies, but in all that can ennoble the heart of man, in religious faith, in purity of life, intellectual cultivation, taste and feeling.

Such were the ties which bound these young men together. The experience of a tenderer attachment on the part of Mr. Frere, proved in no degree injurious to their friendship; the new connection tended rather to confirm the old, by opening a fresh field for the exercise of a perfect and unrestricted confidence. Cranston, though not intimately acquainted with her, thought highly of the beauty and accomplishments of the lady

whom Frere had chosen, and was ready, in his capacity of friend, to take on trust all the fine endowments of heart and mind (and 'where was the limit to any of them?') which it pleased Manley Frere to attribute to his beloved.

There were few things that vexed Mr. Cranston more than the remarks which a somewhat worldly-minded mother of his was continually repeating to him, on the instability of young men's friendships, especially when a marriage on either side intervened to widen and weaken the circle of attachment. "It is all very well," she would say, as she saw her son breaking the seal of some letter of Frere's, full of his daily proceedings, his hopes, anxieties, and anticipations of approaching happiness; "It is all mighty fine, Richard; but depend on it, my dear, you two will never be half nor a quarter the cronies you are now when once Manley Frere gets him a wife. He may look out for a better living for you, and I trust he will; but as for these long-winded letters that pass between you every two or three days (what you can find to say to each other so often, it passes my poor wit to imagine!) and all the wonderful regard he professes for you just now, between ourselves, Dick, I would not have you reckon on its lasting over the honeymoon, I would not indeed, my dear! I never saw an instance to the contrary, and you may have heard your poor father say the same scores of times. No, no, Richard, directly there's a Mrs. Frere in the case, away flies all the husband's friendship for you; and if I were in your place, my dear, I would lose no time in giving a hint

(and a pretty broad one, too) about that living of Micklesham-Basset. Only manage to get his promise for that when it becomes vacant, in writing mind ; be sure to have it down in black and white, Dick ; and then I may allow that this schoolboy intimacy has done you some service."

Her warm-hearted son, on the other hand, would indignantly repel every suspicion of his friend's fidelity.

"I may not for the future be all that I have been to him, changed as his position in life may be ; I neither expect nor desire it. Frere must have employments and duties when he settles down as a married man, which must prevent his paying so much attention to me ; but that there will ever be any diminution in our esteem or confidence I never will believe."

"Well, well, we shall see how it will all turn out some of these days. But take my advice about Micklesham-Basset, that's all ; get his word for it, either under his own sign-manual or before witnesses ; and then I shall say there has been no great mischief done either one way or the other. Why, what's the matter with you now, I should like to know ?"

"Matter, ma'm ! I cannot bear to hear you talk in this mercenary manner !" and the dialogue would end by the young man flinging out of the room to read his friend's letter, in an atmosphere distinct from that breathed by his only surviving parent ; leaving her to enlarge at her leisure on the ingratitude of children generally, and the special undutifulness of her own son, who had not long since resigned a fellowship at College,

and with it a life of literary tranquillity, adapted thoroughly to all his tastes and disposition, in order to provide her and the two giddy girls, his sisters, with a more comfortable home than they could have commanded elsewhere.

Conversation like this was recurring pretty often at the Parsonage, for the sordid spirit of Mrs. Cranston displayed itself more or less in every subject discussed by her: yet, so powerful is the force of habit, and the need (to most men) of woman's sympathy, that as soon as the young rector had learnt what had befallen his friend, and recovered from the first shock of the intelligence, his immediate impulse was to communicate it to his family; to accomplish which purpose he set forth to meet the chaise, which at a certain hour would, according to his calculations, be conveying his mother and sisters home from the house of a neighbouring friend, where they had spent the preceding week.

Yes—though it was but a few days since mother and son had parted in considerable dudgeon, the result of strong opposition of opinion, and even of principle; this sensible man, so rightly judging in things disconnected from his own domestic sphere—so clearly discerning the shoals and breakers which threatened the vexed course of other human vessels, and incapable of piloting his own, went out to tell his griefs to one who, never since he had grown out of pinafores, had responded to his feelings in the manner he looked for and desired.

CHAPTER III.

FAITHFUL OR FALSE?

IN this same filial blindness, assuming that he was in some way to be comforted by the sympathy of Mrs. Cranston and her daughters, Richard felt disappointed when the little open carriage containing them did not arrive in sight at that point of the road from whence he expected to see it approaching, and he murmured to himself—"Always too late! Ever behind-hand, whether it be business or pleasure that engrosses their giddy minds. And, after all, poor things! I don't know why I should be so eager to cloud their satisfaction with my dismal tidings. But there is no consistency left in this forlorn world, and why should I pretend to more of it than my neighbours? Except Frere himself, I never knew one who was invariably considerate of the feelings of others—strictly just in small things as well as great. And he, poor fellow! Ah, who can tell if the very excellence of his nature may not be in some sort a disadvantage to him now! A man of inferior stamp could not feel this stroke with equal severity—one of a vain and commonplace character would find a hundred sources of consolation too trifling and ignoble to satisfy *him*."

Thus, sorrowfully philosophizing, Mr. Cranston sauntered by the wayside till the family drag appeared in view, and caused him to quicken his steps.

“What’s the matter now, my dear?” inquired the elder lady, seeing her son advancing with an expression of unusual seriousness. And young voices from the off-side of the jaunting-car exclaimed, “Law, Dickey, what can it be?”

Cranston shook his head. “Bad news, mother! Sad, sad news, my dear girls! The worst we have heard for many a day!”

“Now don’t frighten me, Richard,” his mother rejoined, “or I shall think that Saunders has killed the wrong porker, or that something has happened to the cow.”

“Hang the cow, she is well enough!” was the somewhat testy reply; and, for fear of further guessing, Cranston hastened to tell the cause of his dejection—the great calamity which had befallen the excellent and well-beloved Manley Frere.

Then, to do his audience justice, there was no want of interest in the story, or of exclamation shrill and fast, such as the female tongue delighteth to utter on most occasions, sometimes to the purpose—sometimes not.

“And going to be married so soon, too! Only think!” cried one of the girls.

Her brother answered her despondingly. “Oh, that is as may be hereafter! Your sex, Bessey, are not always patterns of fidelity any more than ours.”

“Oh, never you fancy that!” said Mrs. Cranston. “Manley Frere is much too well off in this world’s

goods to be refused only because he is a little hard of hearing. The Girdlestons are infinitely too wise in their generation for that sort of nonsense, or I am much mistaken in the principles of the family."

"But my dear Richard," said Bessey. "Won't it be an odd sort of a wedding? Funny, eh? Why, poor Mr. Frere won't know when or where to make the responses. I declare it will be hardly legal. Do you remember marrying that deaf old farmer, and making us all laugh so with the account of the ceremony when you came home?"

Her brother answered her in a tone of self-upbraiding. "Ah, Bessey, I shall know better than to laugh at such a scene again!"

The young lady had delicacy enough to appreciate Cranston's newly-awakened scruples; not so the mother that bore her, who simply suggested that it was not likely her son would have such another queer ceremony to perform.

"For I would not have you flatter yourself," said she, "that *you* will be asked to read the service on this occasion, notwithstanding you and the bridegroom are such *mighty* friends together. Never expect it, my dear. Those Girdlestons will be sure to get a Bishop by hook or by crook—nothing less than a *dig-nified* divine will go down with them. Unless, indeed, you may be invited to *assist*," (which word came hissing out of Mrs. Cranston's mouth with all the contempt it deserved—for it must be confessed that the term thus applied cannot be condemned too severely.) "Oh yes, my dear, I dare say

you may be requested to *assist* his lordship in his difficult duty ! But (changing her tone) if I were you, Richard, I would see every one of them at Jericho before I'd be brought into the tail of an advertisement."

And the spirited sentiment was unanimously supported by the other side of the car. The old lady continued to expatiate on this topic a little longer ; but it is evident that her speech must have diverged a trifle from the main argument, as it ended with a rather severe remark on the limpness of her son's shirt-collar, and its manifest want of starch.

Mr. Cranston fell back and allowed the chaise to get considerably ahead of him. Away it jogged, the thoughtless laughter of the girls vexing his sensitive ear, and still more the sensitive mind within him, which was rebelling sorely against the state of things, and bringing full upon his recollection the quiet rooms at College, where once he had dwelt a bachelor in the complete and comfortable sense of the word ; for, in his present mode of life, he was experiencing many of the pains, without any of the pleasures, of matrimony.

But the young clergyman was as free from selfishness as one so susceptible could well be ; and, almost before that provoking giggle had died away, he had reasoned down his irritability, and when, in place of such heartless sounds, the voice of the cuckoo stole unmolested on his ear, he sank again into his previous musing, forgetting himself and his own troubles in the greater affliction of his friend.

It might be there was something in the song of the

bird which encouraged gentle thoughts ; so often as he had stood with that friend listening to the note, which was a favourite with Manley Frere. A dreamy character attaches to it—a something, too, of mystery, arising from the shy habits of the songster, which struck Mr. Frere's poetical taste. He was enthusiastic in his love for the singing of birds, and had a host of fanciful notions upon the subject. Many of these, half serious half whimsical, occurred now to Mr. Cranston, who mentally pledged himself that he would from thenceforth treasure these reminiscences of his friend—reflections which, whether valuable or not, could never again be uttered with the same free and joyous spirit in which they were originally poured forth.

Frere loved, especially, to assert the antiquity of this music above all other descriptions of melody. Cranston well remembered the feeling with which his friend had spoken as they were once wandering through some ivy-covered ruins, undoubted vestiges of a period far remote, but the actual date of which had afforded speculation to many an ardent and industrious antiquary—"Hark !" Frere had suddenly exclaimed, interrupting their dispute when it was at the highest, "Cranston, do you hear the bird that is warbling in the bushes there ? Here are we, cavilling about a trifle of a century or two—for the question of date as to these old walls embraces no more—and that bird traces his generations by thousands upwards ; and the self-same strain that is agitating his little throat, has been sung by his feathered forefathers—who shall say how far back in the history of the

creation, or place the limit to the antiquity of that strain? The efforts of the oldest musician on record are modern compared with his; even David's psalms and the song of Miriam. And then to think how dry and meagre are the original themes which have been handed down to us, to be worked out painfully age after age, one master after another, bettering the subject till it grew to be something worth listening to—not so the birds, for they are heaven-taught!"

Cranston had disputed that notion; at least had denied the possibility of ascertaining its truth. "Who could tell," he asked, "how many, or how few, notes the nightingale had originally possessed? Her present rich variety might, for ought they knew, have been gathered together like the ideas of human professors, who seldom scrupled at stealing from their brethren, especially when they could do so undiscovered; a trill, perhaps, had been adopted from this antediluvian fowl of the air, a cadence from that, till, through the lapse of countless ages, the melody had reached its present point. And that which we term perfect of its kind, may still require a period which, to our human arithmetic, would seem little else than eternity before it shall have obtained its ultimate perfection."

But Frere repelled the idea; for it charmed him, he said, to believe, as he roamed the woods, that the same individual melody was sounding in his favoured ear that had been chanted on the morning of creation, even at the moment when the angels shouted for joy to see the world so fresh and beautiful. "You are almost

as bad, Cranston"—it was thus he went on—"as a stupid fellow I fell in with last year, as I was walking through Brittany, who wished that the birds had a new song every spring, 'like the girls at the Opera,' for he professed himself tired to death of the old ones. Then did I extol the wisdom of nature, who, in granting us such an accompaniment to our meditations amongst her works, keeps it sacred from our wretched attempts at improvement. We may destroy—if it so pleaseth us—for we have dominion over the lives of the feathered creation—we may kill the bird and stop his singing; but as long as that song is permitted to gladden earth and skies, our blundering efforts to better it can neither add too nor detract one note from the gamut. If man could meddle with such things, imagine the direful improvements that would be heard amongst the high trees and creeping trellis-work! What ill-conceived harmonies would be bursting from every bosky brake! But here he is happily foiled: he may follow out his giant schemes, pierce rocks, turn rivers from their time-worn courses; the little birds defy him still; the smallest thing that flies from twig to twig, may look down on the animal, boasting himself her master, and chirrup at her own discretion, never—Heaven be praised for it a thousand times!—never at his!"

As Cranston's memory, quickened by the connecting influence of this solitary note, recalled to him the image of his beloved friend, his animated look and gesture, as he had thus discoursed upon a topic which, trifling as it then seemed, now took an interest of a deeper and

more peculiar character; he felt as if, for the first time, all the truth and bitterness of Frere's reflections came upon him in their full reality. Was it indeed possible that that ear, once so susceptible of the exquisite power of sound, was never again to be blest with what it had so delighted in? And oh, worse still! was their intimacy to be deprived of what Mr. Frere had justly pronounced the greatest charm of perfect confidence, "the power of hearing and estimating the same idea at the same moment of time." His soul sickened, and the sunlight seemed to depart from his own earthly course, as he grew more and more sensible of the bleakness which must for ever hover over the prospects of his friend.

Mr. Cranston's next attempt at securing a sympathetic auditor was more successful than his first. Old Mrs. Jecott, the governante of his small establishment, who had once been his careful nurse and was now his faithful housekeeper, was equally qualified by her long services in his family, and her natural endowments, to take the liveliest interest in all that concerned him. Often had it occurred to the young rector, when pained by the volubility of his sisters, or offended by his mother's obtuseness to every sentimental feeling, to find in the homely but never vulgar conversation of this shrewd old woman, a comfort not to be derived from any other creature in his house. He might be tempted occasionally to correct her English, but had seldom to find fault with the sentiments it unfolded. The day did not close, therefore, till Jecott had been made cognizant of all the graver part of his anxiety, and had been intrusted

besides with many more of the minor details than he would have ventured to hazard to the wandering attention and coarse remarks of her mistress.

Jefcott had seen enough of Mr. Frere to be interested in him for his own sake; and, had he been less engaging than he really was, the warm friendship subsisting between him and her master would have sufficed to engage her unaffected sympathy. With the true aim of a feeling heart, as well as a discerning mind, her observations went straight to the point, "To think of him being struck at an age like that! for I think Mr. Frere's younger by a year or two than you, Mr. Richard. Dear, dear! so gay as he was the very last time as I see him; and here we are mourning over the poor young gentleman as if he was gone to his grave. When it overtakes an old person—such a one as me we'll say—nobody wonders, and nobody cares; and indeed, sir, it seems to me that deafness is sometimes rather a blessing than not to us old folks; it keeps us, you know, from hearing a great deal that's very disagreeable. If old Jacob Green, that lives near the churchyard, was a little more hard of hearing, he wouldn't be always worrying and complaining about the tolling of the church bells, and the crying of his little grandchildren, poor little dears; and if King Lear had been deaf, you know, Mr. Richard, he'd never have heard half the wicked things them daughters of his used to say about him; but it's quite another thing when it falls upon the young. And then there's Mr. Frere's young lady: what will *she* say to it, do you think, sir?"

“What *should* she say to it?” returned her master with some sharpness, and a suspicious glance at the old woman, as she stood leaning over one of the high-backed chairs in his little study, her broad wrinkled face and deep set eyes turned steadily upon him. “What would you imagine any woman in her predicament saying, but that she was ready to follow her lover in sorrow as well as in joy; and that it would be her delight, no less than her duty, to comfort and cherish him to the end of his days? Why surely, Jefcott, you, who have a heart yourself, can never suspect that charming Miss Girdlestone of wanting an article so essential to a young lady. You do not suppose she would give my friend up only because he has lost his hearing? No, no, no! He, poor fellow, may entertain a doubt, for he is full of modesty, and the very soul of disinterestedness; but no one but himself—no one at least who knows and estimates Manley Frere at his true value—can suspect her willingness to fulfil their engagement.”

Jefcott screwed up her lips, and giving her head three separate and decided nods, replied, “Don’t you be too sure of that, Mr. Richard; I may be out in my reckoning, and I hope it will prove so; but something comes across me that them two young people will never be man and wife.”

Her master, pausing in his contemplative walk across the room, turned round at this, “Why, what on earth makes you say that, you old raven?”

“Ha, ha,” said she, “you don’t mean that for a compliment, Mr. Richard; but for my part I don’t know a

cleverer bird than a raven—young or old, he's not one of them as is to be caught with chaff, any more than I, old and humble as I stand here, am like to be taken in by a pretty face. Mind I don't say she *won't* have him, because that would be the height of presumption—perhaps she may, and perhaps she mayn't; but it would no ways surprise me if Miss Girdlestone was to give up Mr. Frere—I can't say as it would."

"Martha," said her master in an admonitory tone—(it was singular, by the way, that while his mother's assurance that Miss Girdlestone *would* fulfil her engagement with his friend annoyed him, he was not less disturbed by the opposite opinion of his housekeeper that she would *not*)—"Martha, you ought to have very substantial reasons for what you are saying, reflecting as it does on the character of a young lady like Barbara Girdlestone."

"I don't know what you might think of my reasons, Mr. Richard, but they are enough for a simple body such as me."

"Now, Patty, let me have none of that nonsense. I observe that, whenever you are disposed to be mischievous, you always preface your scandal with some parade about your being a 'simple body' as you call it—as if your soul had not much more to do with the question. Come, out with your story, for I want to go to bed! What wonderful matter is it that makes you think this charming girl likely to turn out the falsest jilt in Christendom?"

"Oh, it won't seem consequential to you, Mr. Richard

—moonshine on the water you'll call it, or something to that effect ; and next Sunday we shall have a sermon against the sin of slandering our neighbour, as happened you know not very long ago, just after I gave you that little hint about Sally Groves and the recruiting sergeant ;—and a very fine discourse it was, sir, I don't know as I ever heerd you preach a finer. Only you see, Mr. Richard, after all, Sally *was* sent away from her place without a character—wasn't she, sir?"

"Well, well, we'll not talk about that now."

"Oh, I only brought up poor Sally again because you scolded me for judging her on light grounds ; and yet, as things turned out, you were obleeged to own that the old raven had some cause for her croaking, weren't you, Mr. Richard? But for all that, sir, I doubt when you've heerd all I've got to say about Mr. Manley's young lady, whether you won't make just the same objection ; however, I shall speak my mind, nevertheless."

"No doubt you will! Well, now, let us have it."

"Do you remember the night of the great christening-party up at the Warburtons? Old Lady Warburton was so kind as to ask me to come up to the Hall and see the supper laid out—and a grand sight it was, to be sure ; and afterwards, when she saw me amongst the rest of the servants standing at the door of the ball-room looking at the dancing, what did she do—she was always a affable old lady—but make me come in, and give me a place on one of the window-seats, where I could see every thing quite nice, and not be in the way. That was the only time I ever set eyes on Miss Girdlestone ;

but there she was to be sure, and a pretty young lady I thought her—and there was Mr. Frere; and though he wasn't always dangling after her and tied to her apron-string, as many a gentleman in his condition would have been, yet if any one noticed him as curious as I did, they might have seen that his looks were never long away from her; and when he would be talking and making the agreeable to the other ladies, yet I could see as plain as anything that the best part of his thoughts was with her all the while"—a sort of groan from her master, as he stood leaning against the mantel-piece, checked her—"You remember that night Mr. Richard?"

"Ay, ay! Go on, Martha," with another deep-drawn sigh, for well Mr. Cranston remembered it. It had seemed to him that it must have been to his friend a scene of unmingled felicity, brilliant yet pure, the joyous present unshaded by one misgiving of the future; and, incapable as Cranston was of a malevolent emotion, he had that night been obliged to repress a something bordering on the envious, as he had contrasted his own insignificant person with the fine form and easy movements of Manley Frere, and thought how impossible it would be for him, under any circumstances, to attract the favourable notice of such a woman as Barbara Girdlestone.

"Well, Mr. Richard," Martha proceeded, "those two had been dancing together--a decent dance, not like them pokers."

"Polkas, Martha—P-o-l-k."

"Ah, it comes to much about the same—you know

what I mean ; and it so happened that Mr. Frere was called out of the room—there was a sick horse of his in the stable, and the farrier was just come over from Winslow, and wanted to speak to him about the poor beast. And so he and his pretty partner, they came walking down the room side by side, talking and joking, till, just as they got near me (I was sitting just within the door), they stopped—he going out, and she turning back again ; and first it was something about the horse, she sending her love to Bushefalus—that was his name, or something like it—and wishing she could kiss him and make him well. Just the sort of stuff you know, sir, that sounds very well out of a pretty mouth, but wouldn't suit at all if it came out of an ugly one ; and then, just as they were parting, I heard Mr. Frere say to her, ' Now promise me one thing—I sha'n't be gone,' says he, ' a quarter of an hour : don't poke (or p-o-l-k, as you call it, Mr. Richard)—don't,' says he, ' do that while I'm gone.' I listened all I was able to catch her answer, but I could only hear something about not liking to be ' particular.' It must have been something to that effect ; for then I heard him say in his nice way, looking down upon her with a sort of proud fondness—' Ah, Barbara,' he says, ' don't flatter yourself you can escape notice: the beautiful and the good must always be particular in this world, because there are so few of them.' I don't say as them was the very words ; but, whatever they were, they meant the same thing, and then he repeated what he had said before, only in a more pressing way. But, before he could finish, she turned away and she says, ' Well, I'll think

about it,' or, 'I'll see about it,' or something of that careless sort, and then they went their different ways. Well, Mr. Richard, you may fancy that, being in the secret, as I may say, I war'n't slow at watching what should come to pass. They were just striking up one of those nasty jiggeting tunes that my poor father would have broken his fiddle in two before he'd ever have played—and presently I see ever so many gentlemen (boys and others) come clustering round her, but between while I could see her first looking downcast and very modest like, and then she'd look up at them and say something that should make them all laugh. I guessed what they were after, and I got as anxious and fidgety as if I had been that good young man's own mother, instead of being nothing but an old raven, or an old scandalmonger, if that suits you better, Mr. Richard."

"Well," said her master, whose interest was awakened by the story, trifling as it seemed—"and did she polk after all?"

"Didn't she!" was the indignant answer, every feature of the old woman's expressive of her honest scorn. "Didn't she let that lankey captain that lives down at Fulverton—him with the red hair; didn't I see her let him take her round the waist and spin her about, while her pretty little nose was almost touching his nasty sandy whiskers! And there they went, jiggeting here, and tittuping there! Oh, Mr. Richard, if such a dance as this had been brought into fashion in my poor father's time, I think it would have gone very nigh to be the death of him!" to account for which second allusion

of Martha's to the deceased Mr. Jefcott, in reference to the humours of a modern ball-room, it may be as well to state that her father had been a dancing-master in his day; though, alas! from an unlucky predilection for uniting bacchanalian pleasures with those of Terpsichore, that day had come to a premature and melancholy close.

But with the tragic period of the old housekeeper's early career we have nothing to do, nor even with what may be termed its more grotesque portion, except to notice the strange contrast offered by Jefcott's coarse features and thickset person with the reminiscences which, in her confidential chat with her master, she would occasionally fall back upon, of cotillons and gavottes, interspersed even with terms relating to the profession in its more scientific range; for her honoured sire, as long as drink allowed him a leg to stand upon, had been connected with the stage, and had brought out two of his daughters as ballet-dancers—"nice slim young creatures, just made for it!" Martha would describe them with a sigh,—“God knows what's come of them, poor dears! for when my poor father went off we was all scattered hither and thither; and to be sure I've always thought what a mercy it was for me that I was too fat for the profession. Always stumpy, Mr. Richard, and had no 'a plum' as they used to call it. They tried me once for a zephyr that they wanted in a hurry; it was when poor little Therese le Gros had the measles come out upon her the very night of a grand new bally, and so they dressed me up in her things, for we were much of a height, but it wouldn't do, for I was always an extra

size t'other way. Well, but to finish my story about Miss Girdlestone. Mr. Frere didn't come back till just as she was leaving off, but he could see what tricks she had been after; and, if ever that young lady felt uncomfortable in her life, I think it must have been then when she met his eyes: not that he looked altogether cross, I should say it was more sorry and reproachful that he looked at her, but I saw she guessed what was passing in his thoughts, for she took his arm and they went their ways into another room, she talking and coaxing him like; and I suppose, with her pretty smile and winning ways, she soon got the better of him, for when I saw them together again, they were dancing just as if nothing had happened. But not that poker," said Martha, shaking her head; "no, not a bit of it! Mr. Frere's much too much of a real gentleman to do such a thing himself, or to ask any young lady (let alone his own particular one) to have to do with such a low-lived proceeding."

"You are right, Martha," said her master; "the encouragement of this immodest and ungraceful dance is a convincing proof, if any were wanting, that more is said about our national improvement in either morals or taste than can be fairly established. Awkward to the sight, and painful to the ear, it has not one quality to recommend it to the favour of a modest woman! Probably the fact that it *does* border closely upon what is improper forms its great charm with the majority of young people; but what shall be said of the mothers and fathers who can stand by and sanction so gross a violation of delicacy as every ball-room now exhibits!

Ah, well, it is of no use to grumble at what we cannot reform; we must be off to bed now, Martha; so, good-night to you. The pretty Barbara may not be quite the pure-minded piece of excellence we should wish her to be; yet she may have love enough still left for my poor friend, not to turn her back upon him in the hour of his sorest affliction. I hope still, in spite of the polka, Patty, to get a more cheerful letter from him to-morrow."

"Hope you may, I'm sure, sir. I wouldn't take offence at another sermon on defamation next Sunday; I should be rather glad to hear it."

"No, no, Jescott, we are agreed at least on this point—in *our* Utopia there will be no polka-dancing."

"Ah, Mr. Richard, if I could only live to see a good old minuit again, such as my father used to teach the young ladies at boarding-schools; there was true grace and dignity, if you please!"

"Nay, Martha! now you are advocating a very extreme measure; object as we may to the present state of things, I *think* we must stop short of the minuet."

CHAPTER IV.

DAMON TO PYTHIAS.

THE morrow came, but brought no tidings of Mr. Frere ; another and another day, and still no letter. And Cranston, anxious and disturbed, entertained serious thoughts of leaving his parish to the care of a neighbouring clergyman, and setting off to join his friend and learn the truth, when on the fourth day the letter arrived. Mr. Cranston too truly divined its contents, and he opened it with a sinking heart, and *not* in the presence of his mother. Thus it ran—

“ All is over, and Heaven wills that I should wear out my desolate existence separated for ever from the only being whose society could render that existence tolerable to me. She gives me up, Cranston—the act which condemns me to desolation may be veiled in language less abrupt, but it can bear no other meaning. I am abandoned in my utmost need ; at the time I most required all the strength and tenderness of her love, she has denied it me, and cast me off for ever !

“ Of course I have not seen her, she has not even written to me. Is this silence, think you, an admission of there being really something indefensible in her con-

duct ? or is it only, as the family would have me believe, that she is so wrought upon by her feelings as to be unequal to holding any direct communication with me ? that she is ill—wretched—suffering (so they word it) more than I ? If I could believe *that*, I might indeed pity her ; but it is impossible—and I would rather she had spoken out honestly, telling me she had been deceived by the symptoms of a girlish passion, and that the flame had expired with the first gust of misfortune : the confession might have hurt me, but I should have respected its sincerity at least. Instead of this straightforward proceeding, the aunt takes upon her to address me ; Mrs. Girdlestone, weak and infirm, has always been governed by this elder sister, and her influence over Barbara is far too great. I am conscious of not being yet in a state to appreciate fairly the motives and feelings of those who are torturing me ; but I think that, under a pretence of great concern for me, this letter of Mrs. Barrington's was a laboured and shallow production. I have long suspected that she did not cordially favour our engagement. Under much elegance of manner she conceals an essentially vulgar mind ; and her esteem for mere rank is so great that I am convinced in her heart she rejoices over a calamity which affords her a chance of securing a titled husband for her niece. There is a certain Lord Heathcote, foolish, profligate, and needy, whom she would much prefer to me ; and that in the end she will compass her evil designs I have scarcely a doubt, and I shall live to know that the sweet creature I once so doated on, is suffering hourly contamina-

tion as the wife of this man. What particularly offended me in this letter was the tone in which Mrs. Barrington affected to consult my advantage. I was told that Barbara, amiable as she was, did not possess the character I ought now to seek for in a wife—she wanted the steadiness which alone could fit her for being the constant companion of one suffering under a bereavement like mine. Of course, she went on to say, had I insisted on my right, the Girdlestones would not have interfered to disturb an arrangement which had been so long existing; but as I generously resigned all claim to the hand of their dear child, they could not in justice to her decline accepting the release I offered. Barbara was heart-broken (that phrase was more than once repeated); but the sacrifice her sense of honour might dictate was what they could none of them think themselves justified in sanctioning. I have said that Mrs. Barrington has some influence with her; but, Cranston, had she been truly desirous to complete our betrothment, I know enough of Barbara to be certain that she would have maintained her resolution, though every relation belonging to her had opposed it.

“The letter was delivered to me by her father and two of her brothers; their meaning was well enough, no doubt. One cannot suspect them of needlessly wounding the man they were bent on crushing to the earth; but surely the good taste of such a family convocation at such a time may be questioned. When I was staggering under a blow like that, to be gathering around me, observing my countenance and movements as if I had

been some strange curiosity, and each in his way gesticulating with an expression of pity, that by its very excess struck me as something almost impertinent. And yet I am judging them harshly, for I believe Mr. Girdleston would have come alone had it not been for the mere softness of his nature. He is not a man of strong mind, and required the countenance and support of his sons during what must have been a severe trial to him. But, if any thing could increase the cruelty of the sentence, it was their delivering it to me in person. I had lately, while awaiting my doom, secluded myself entirely from society ; and I cannot explain to you how painful and humiliating I found it to be at once surrounded, not by merely indifferent people (*that* I am beginning to bear tolerably well), but by persons so intimately connected with all my dearest interests. They who by belonging to her were to have become my relations—with whom I had hitherto been so affectionately united, and whom I had looked to as bearing for the future so friendly a part in all our joys and sorrows. Not one festive occasion would ever have come round in its annual course, without finding these familiar faces assembled round us ; and here they were, but deprived of the slightest trace of their usual expression—changed in every feature, acting a sort of pantomime of grief, and *I* the cause of all !

“ What I have suffered during this interview convinces me more than ever that I am at present unfit for the sight of old friends and acquaintances ; even you, my Cranston, will shew me most real kindness in leaving

me to my miserable self, and to a susceptibility I am ashamed of feeling, and should be still more ashamed to display. Fear not that in time I shall become strong enough to meet the inevitable evils of my condition in whatever form they may appear, and to perform the duties remaining to me—for I suppose that even the deaf *have* duties for which they are qualified, though now to myself I seem a cipher—helpless—hopeless—(as far as concerns the present world)—a useless nonentity. But my reason tells me that I must gradually grow inured to much that now seems insufferable. This very love, that is rooted so deeply in my nature that it would seem to form a part of it, I cannot believe so ill of my own resolution, or of the justice of Heaven, as to doubt but that the efforts I shall and will make to overcome it, will be successful in the end—perhaps sooner than appears possible to me now; and even the image of this lovely but light-minded creature, though never to be obliterated from my memory, must become weakened through the exertion of a determined will. I never had the least respect for the wailings of a deserted lover, and trust to have strength enough to shun the imitation of what in the person of another I have so thoroughly despised.

“In speaking thus of Barbara you will be struck with the contradiction my sentiments now offer to my former professions; but now I see plainly that my candour was more than half assumed, and, in tenderness to her, I magnified my own defects to give her virtue the greater triumph. For, Cranston, in my inmost soul I did *not*

think she would forsake me ; and I still believe that in any of the ordinary vicissitudes that fall to the lot of man, she never would have faltered. Through poverty, or disease, or evil-repute (if undeserved), she would have clung to me with a true and devoted heart ; therefore I must try to recall the sense I had at first, of the sacrifice she would have made in remaining faithful to me ; nor must I be asking myself the useless question, whether in her place I would have acted as poor a part ? Supposing her the sufferer, whether I would have been as false to her, as she has been to me ? For though my answer never varies, though firmly assured that, had this calamity fallen upon her, she would still be as dear to me—ay, a thousand times dearer than ever—I know, when I consider the subject justly and rationally, that the two cases will not bear comparison. In portraying her to myself as robbed of this blessing of existence—in giving to her sweet eyes that wistful, anxious look, which is so apt to characterise those bereaved of hearing, so far from her appearing to me as an object to be shunned, I see her only as a creature more exquisite in her misfortune, more touching from the absence of those high spirits that had once been the delight of all who approached her, more graceful than ever in her gentler, softer movements—not perhaps the very same I had wooed to be my companion through life, but something yet lovelier and more sacred ! But these gentle attributes, which are so akin to woman's nature, bear no relation to those qualities which (and especially in their eyes) form the chief excellence of man ; my reason tells me this, and urges upon

me that I must not, in common candour, estimate her position or feelings in any measure by my own. Yet still, Cranston, still—reasonable as I acknowledge all this to be—my heart is ever whispering another story, calling her false, fleeting—perjured ! And why is it that, with my respect for her so lowered, I still cling to the remembrance of her ? Why not shake off at once and for ever this fond and foolish lingering of the fancy for one whom I perceive to be unworthy of my stronger, nobler love ? It may be that my weakness, as it has been my fault, is to form also my punishment, dooming me still to worship the false image I had set up. But no—smitten as I am, I will not believe myself quite so poor a creature !

“To return to what I was telling you of my future plans, I intend to travel for the next two years, but not to revisit places I have already seen. The northern parts of Europe are luckily quite new to me, and there I may abide as long as I find it convenient, amongst a strange race, and employ myself in the acquirement of languages, the aspect of which will be a perfect novelty, and the sound, were it possible to reach me, could awaken no dangerous association. During this interval I shall hope to throw off much of this morbid sensibility to the opinion of others that now unnerves me ; and, when I return home, my story will be an old one, my misfortunes will seem even to my best friends as a thing of course, and, as I shall then excite no particular notice, I may escape that sensation of singularity which at present haunts me so painfully wherever I go. I wish I could carry out this scheme without further delay, but there is

a good deal yet to be done before I can leave the country. I find Mr. Divet, who happens to be staying near Old Court, extremely useful to me; he, and his father before him, having been formerly our men of business, there are many things relating to this estate in which he is necessarily much more at home than Worthington, my present steward. When I have arranged all I have to do here, there will still, Divet says, be a good deal of business to be looked into; new leases to be drawn up, and so forth, with regard to the London property, in which also I shall find it very convenient to have his advice, and his thorough knowledge of the subject may tend very materially to expedite my departure. It is principally on this account, therefore, that I am inclined to accept a pressing invitation he has given me, to remove to his house whenever I am at liberty to leave my own. It is only thirty miles from town, so that, if necessary, I can go up with him when my presence there may be required; and he promises his assistance in unravelling some of the mysteries of the law as respects landlord and tenant, the technicalities of which, even with his friendly help, I find it difficult to comprehend. All this is the more kind in Mr. Divet, as he has for some years left off business, and is settled elsewhere in what I understand to be a comfortable and gentlemanly way. In many respects such a change—and I only wish I could make it immediately—will suit me well, being almost as far removed as Norway, or Iceland itself, from one familiar face or old remembrance. In another way, too, Divet is likely to be useful to me. I was going, I believe

unwarily, to hire an almost entire stranger in the room of poor Anderson, whose consumptive tendencies are daily increasing, and who would be utterly unequal to a northern journey. But Divet tells me he knows of a man in the neighbourhood of his place at Etheridge who would exactly suit me; though loth, loth indeed shall I be to see another in the place of my good and faithful Anderson! And is it not a strange thing that, just as I am turning my face from home to begin a new life, this poor fellow, who would have seemed such an inevitable link between the past and the future, should be disabled from serving me any longer? What an utter alienation from all I once valued! One only thing must still be left me, now more invaluable than ever—your friendship, Cranston—how truly may I say, ‘passing the love of woman!’—*that* I cannot do without; so if you should ever find yourself growing cold like her—and the time may come (for neither to you nor to any other can I be the Manley Frere of old times)—but should it be so, Dick, in pity do not let me know the change that comes over you; but rather, in the spirit of that heavenly charity I have often seen you display in the case of other unhappy and desolate creatures, do your best still to deceive me. My only friend—my sole comfort—my dearest, most beloved Cranston—never, never may you know one-tenth part of the misery that weighs your poor Manley to the very earth.”

We will not enlarge on the depressing effect this letter had upon all such of the household at Sheen Rectory as were, from pure compassion or any other motive, in-

terested in the fate of Mr. Frere, or the various ways in which the dismal despatch was commented on; it will suffice to say, that when Richard Cranston that night laid his saddened head upon his pillow, the words which rang chiefly in his ears were something about that “nasty polka, Mr. Richard,” and a something else about Mickle-sham-Basset.

I had little difficulty in heading this last letter of Mr. Frere’s with a pair of names so celebrated in the records of friendship, as to convey my meaning at a glance; but why is it that when I would compliment my female correspondents in the same way, I find myself at a loss to discover any two ladies who have made themselves proverbial for the fidelity of their attachments? It is truly mortifying to be obliged to resort to fiction for what I want; and yet I solemnly aver that throughout the whole course of history, ancient or modern, not a single instance occurs to me—no, not so much as one poor brace of names—unless it be those of the good old spinsters of Llangollen; and even they—alas! would the same habitation have continued to hold them in conjunction so many years, but for the rash and romantic vow where-with they had bound themselves?

CHAPTER V.

TILBURINA IN WHITE SATIN, TO HER CONFIDANTE
IN DIMITY.

THE letter subjoined is bound for a village in Leicestershire, and directed to a lady residing in that county:—

“ Will you be angry, or sorry, or shocked, my dear Lucy, when I tell you your warning came just too late to aid me in my deliberations ? the day before it reached me the Colonel had made his offer, and I—yes, Lucy—I had accepted him ! and as the step is, of course, irrevocable, I think it will please you to be assured that your letter would in no degree have affected my resolution. I will not assert that my dear cousin’s remonstrances and advice about ‘ self-examination ’—‘ doing nothing rashly,’ and so on, with that dreadful—dreadful picture of the unspeakable misery of an ill-assorted union, failed to touch me—it would be doing injustice to my Lucy’s deep thought and force of expression to suppose that they could be read with indifference ; on the contrary, your words took a strange hold on my ima-

gination—a bewildering effect, such as I can hardly express—a sort of frightened feeling, as if I had really done something wrong—or dangerous at least; and as I sat in my lonely room, though the window was shut and the day far from chilly, I shivered from head to foot. A very little calm consideration soon quieted me, however; for the advice which would suit so many women on the eve of marriage, is quite inapplicable to me, and in giving it you have consulted your own character—not mine. Be assured that whatever acuteness of feeling and warmth of fancy I may once have possessed, circumstances have so thoroughly checked their development that my original nature has long become extinct, and given place to a calculating self-possession, which must effectually guard me against the perils your livelier imagination conjures up. Remember the life which has formed those habits and turn of thought, and fear nothing for me. At what period of my youth have I ever been liable to those lively visions of a girlish mind which, in their subsequent effect on my disposition, might cause me to repent my acceptance of an estimable man like Colonel Hussey? ‘The heart alone knoweth its own bitterness’—and I cannot expect you to estimate all the corroding influences, small as well as great, which have shed gall and wormwood into mine. In fact, melancholy as my life has been since our knowledge of each other began, and calculated, as you must have seen, to deaden every tendency to romance, I believe it to have been more the apprenticeship of my childhood—my almost infant years—which has worn down all

the elements of fancy, and, by forcing me to behold all things as they really and truly exist, with no false colouring supplied by vague hopes or animal spirits, has made me the commonplace creature I am. Though favouring neither the forms nor spirit of Quakerism, the universe, and whatever it contains, has been ever a dust-coloured world to me—pure, unmingled drab! A colour I know you detest, because you think it unbecoming to your complexion; in the figurative sense in which I apply the colour, it is equally unfavourable to the soul.

“I wish I could give you an adequate idea of the troubles of my earliest days, the incessant struggle with poverty, and the vain attempt to keep up an appearance of gentility—(shabby at the best)—which it was the business of my poor mother’s life to preserve; but the preserving of which interfered so grievously with my childish comfort and amusements. Precocious and sensitive beyond my years, I soon learned to comprehend what was agitating or depressing the friends I loved, and to participate in more of their maturer feelings than could be good for me. As I look back to that period—and how often it comes before me again in all its bitterness!—I can hardly fancy a worse school for the nurture of the poetic portion of our nature. At an age when other children in their play-hours are beginning to weave together their own crude yet harmless fancies, and are applying to themselves the fairy stories that are told them, or the romances they read by stealth, my dawning faculties were bounded within the prosaic

circle of a home, the scene of hopeless privation, and—what is far more deteriorating to a young mind—possessed with those demons of strife and bickering, recrimination and contempt, which are so often the inseparable companions of poverty. Brought up in scenes like these, how can I give faith to what I hear or read about cheerful, uncomplaining indigence, and of family affection growing brighter as the common purse becomes exhausted? for I know that ours was no uncommon case. Instances of suffering virtue continuing virtue still, may occur amongst the very poor who are not ashamed of the heritage they have been born to; but surely not where there are what are called *appearances* to be maintained—for then a constant falsehood is to be played, which eats like a canker into the heart of all concerned; then comes envy of those without doors, and cold distrust of those within—for many a fault comes out in all its nakedness which might have lain hidden but for this united curse of poverty and pretence, till at last frailty and misfortune are so intermingled, that the coolest observer would scarcely be able to say where pity ought to end and blame begin.

“I have no intention of inflicting on you a history of my life, which would be profitable to neither of us. I merely refer to it to convince you how impossible a subject I must be for these visitations of softer feeling in which, whatever you, my dear Lucy, may think to the contrary, a something of the fictitious must always mingle—innocent perhaps—as far as any thing human can be called so, but still resting their charm on what I

perceive to be sheer delusion. With my way of life for some years past, you are better acquainted. You are aware, at least since my fourteenth year, it has been spent almost exclusively in attending on the old and infirm, and latterly in passing from one death-bed to another, as the duties of relationship, and the necessities of my dependent condition, required of me. You have pitied me, and done whatever you could to lighten my task ; but even you have never known (for I am not naturally communicative) the real nature of the trials I had to sustain. It was not, as you perhaps supposed, the mere monotony of my existence that caused me to repine ; for we know that, through the sweet temper and resignation of the patient, a sick-room may be made the abode of peace and even cheerfulness—*this* I can believe, though I have never seen it, for, indeed, my experience of such scenes has been far different. Despondency, dark and hopeless, or a senseless fatalism that froze my own energies, and drove me to the brink of the same horrible scepticism ; these were the companions I had to help me in soothing the unhappy sufferers with whom my lot was cast. No doubt, I have to charge my own weakness with much of this—with all that made it dangerous to me ; but in addition to what I had to endure from the sight of bodily suffering, often of the most agonizing description, I had, young as I was, to struggle against the fearful doctrine and example which were undermining my religious faith—the only hope, the only consolation, left me in these moments of bewilderment. Often when I have been tasking my strength to assist

the nurse at the bedside, when I have held the medicine or broth to the lips of that miserable sufferer—you know to which of my poor friends I allude—I have been rewarded, Lucy, with such expressions, such language, that my soul has shrunk within me, and I have turned from his pillow in disgust. And yet (for he was a man of powerful intellect) his words have but too often taken hold upon me, and suggested dangerous thoughts, to be at one season fearlessly entertained, at another combated with all the strength of my sinking soul. Were *these* scenes likely to afford me time or inclination for idle dreams? and can I ever lose the baneful effect they have left behind them? They have sharpened my reason, but hardened my heart. No, Lucy, those aspirations and cravings after some unknown and impossible felicity, which are so common to the young and happy, are not, as you would have me believe, frozen in my heart; their source I know to be altogether dried up—the fountain can never flow again! That which you call the poetry of life (most pleasant no doubt to those who can cultivate it) is to me unattainable; because my long vigils in these chambers of sin and anguish have forced me to think deeply on all manner of subjects, and to separate the true from the false with a decision I could never have arrived at, had the illusions of romance mingled in the remotest degree with my reflections. The world seen thus, with a perfectly free and impartial judgment, can only appear as a place of probation or punishment—never of pleasure. No creature save yourself will guess the nature of my feelings, not even the man I marry.

I shall fulfil as well as I am able all the duties of life, and partake of its amusements; but I can never have any sympathy with the sanguine or sentimental. With this peculiarity of disposition, I own I should have chosen a single life if I had had courage enough to encounter again that struggle with poverty and dependence which has already had such a blighting effect upon my character. To that I attribute all my weakness, for it has been the terror and misery of my lot hitherto, and my heart sickens at the prospect of tempting it again.

“I am afraid that you, with your generosity, and a spirit that has known little of sorrow but the name, will despise me for such reasoning—why do I call it by that high-sounding name? it is impulse only, and nothing better. My resolution quails at what I might have to undergo when launched into the world alone, and all but friendless—it is with me a case of necessity more than choice. Lucy, I may be losing your good opinion by this confession, but I am not equal to the trials of life, and I thankfully shun them when they can be avoided, by accepting a worthy and far from disagreeable man, who is willing to link his fate with mine, and take me as his companion. That harsh discipline, which has taught me to estimate the truth and nothing but the truth, while it shews me his foibles and defects, saves me from all danger of exaggerating them unfairly, as might be the case with a more imaginative person. Guided by the same unerring counsellor, I estimate at their real value his many estimable qualities; and, as I dream of no unbounded felicity in his company, I am

persuaded that these solid virtues of his will be sufficient to ensure all the comfort it is possible for me to know. So far from thinking my future peace endangered, or that I am making any sacrifice by engaging myself to Colonel Hussey, I am sure it is he alone who will have cause to complain, when he finds out with what a very uninteresting person he has burthened himself; and, when I see him so well contented with the poor bargain he has made, I feel quite as much disposed to pity him as to congratulate myself. It is not for lack of warning that he is so deceived. I have told him repeatedly how it stands with me; that I am cold of heart, spiritless, broken-down, a mere lifeless machine,—my representations only amuse without convincing him, and he answers me with some fine speech about my ‘charming humility.’ Some women would be satisfied to suppose that their personal attractions had purchased them a husband; the thought is humiliating to me. I think no better of myself than before he addressed me, and half despise him for being so easily pleased. As he has preferred me, however, and as we *are* to pass our lives together, I can only hope that his blindness may last as long as our fellowship on earth, and that he may never be awakened to the knowledge of what a helpless, thankless being he has taken to himself for a wife.

“If you write after Monday next, direct to me at David Divet’s, Esq., Etheridge, Surrey. The people to whom my uncle’s property devolved upon his death are desirous of entering into possession immediately, and having no friends of my own with whom I should

wish to remain for more than a day or two, and Colonel Hussey tells me I am too young, and (of course) he adds too handsome, to be alone in lodgings, I have consented to remove for the present to these friends of his, the Divets. They are in some way related to the Husseys, and he thinks so highly of them that I must not say to him, what I need not scruple to tell you, that I feel no small repugnance to the arrangement. My objection, however, is of so vague a nature that I would not mention it to any one but yourself; yet it is strange how pertinaciously these impressions of our early years will last, and I would fain know how far people of ordinary amiability feel as I do, or whether there is any thing peculiar in my disposition, which induces me to lay a malicious emphasis on the bad rather than the good which is reported of my species. For instance, here is Colonel Hussey, a person of whose judgment I think highly, strict in his own principles, and not likely to be prejudiced in his estimation of others. Well, why should I not believe what he says of his cousin, instead of hearkening to a wicked little voice which keeps whispering in my ear, whenever his name is mentioned, ‘That rogue Divet!’—‘that rascal of an attorney!’—‘that pettifogging miscreant, old Divet!’ for thus it was that, in the days of my childhood, I used to hear this very person described. There was some lawsuit, in which my mother was concerned, which ultimately went against her—as every thing connected with us was sure to do; and this Mr. Divet was engaged on the other side, and was thought by us, and the few friends who took an interest in us, to

have pursued some unfair advantages. The property in dispute was but a few hundreds, a matter of small importance to those who gained the day, but to us the loss was severe indeed—the injury never forgotten. I was too young at that time to enter into the particulars or merits of the case ; but the grief that ensued made a strong impression on me, and I may be allowed to lay some stress upon this incident, as it was almost the only point upon which I ever remember my unhappy parents perfectly agreeing. Whatever altercation they might have on things of greater or less moment, on this there was no shadow of difference or dispute : viz., that ‘old Divet’ was a ‘consummate rogue,’ and they expressed this conviction in my almost infant ears, till it became, I fear, quite as much an article of faith to me as any clause in my catechism. There were two oldish maiden sisters of my mother’s, who I fancy must have had a very deep interest in this unlucky suit, or I should not have constantly associated the shabbiness of their appearance, their faded dress, and still more faded complexions, with the baleful influence of ‘Lawyer Divet.’ A word from the Colonel would settle the question of identity between his cousin and this legal phantom, the object of my childish antipathy ; but the plan of my going to Etheridge was hurriedly suggested at our last meeting, and no communication except by letter has since then occurred between us ; and perhaps it may be best to avoid any direct inquiry, for it would be very painful to me to be certain that I was indebted for even the commonest offices of hospitality to one so particularly

obnoxious to my family ; and yet, unacquainted as I am with the real facts of the case, I could scarcely, on that ground alone, refuse to mix with Colonel Hussey's relations. Had these Divets been long settled at Etheridge, one might naturally have supposed them a race distinct from the Divets of Yorkshire ; but from something the Colonel said, I am inclined to think these cousins of his are not very old inhabitants of Surrey, at least that is not their native county. I console myself, however, with the certainty that the present proprietor of the Etheridge mansion, or cottage, or lodge, or whatever its designation may be, cannot be the same person so execrated in my own family ; for even then—and it is seventeen years ago—he was always spoken of as ‘old Divet.’ I have to this day a recollection of wondering what was meant by his having ‘one foot in the grave ;’ the other, I am happy to think, must have followed its companion long ago. So all I have to do is to wrestle with this evil thought amongst others—this horror of all who bear the name of Divet ; and trust that the old man's children have inherited none of their father's bad qualities, legal or illegal. Let me add, in justice to these people, that as soon as Colonel Hussey's wishes were intimated, they sent me a most polite invitation to make their house my home as long as I should find it convenient to remain there,—in fact, so cordial was the style of their letter, that but for the name by which it was signed, I should have accepted the proposal most willingly ; but that unlucky ‘Divet’ at the end spoiled all that had gone before. I wish that name had been less peculiar ; had it

been as common as Jones or Brown, I might never have suspected their descent from the old attorney, and still more do I wish that the Colonel had not a relation on the face of the earth. I do not, as I have told you, fear marrying him—I have quite made up my mind to that ; but it annoys me to think that all his cousins, good, bad, or indifferent, must then be counted as mine also—to be sure we shall soon be going to India, and losing sight of them pretty effectually. Alas, alas ! it is a sad reflection after all, Lucy, that except yourself there will not be a single creature in my native country whom it will cost me a sigh to part from. But now, good-bye for the present: I will write next week, and tell you how I am getting on at Etheridge.—Yours, ever affectionately,

“ MARIA PALLISER.”

CHAPTER VI.

NINE-AND-TWENTY DIVETS !

AN objection to strangers, founded not so much on constitutional shyness, as upon a misanthropical dislike to her species in general, this, and her strong prejudice against the name of Divet, had tinged the mind of Miss Palliser with a gloomy impression of every thing relating to her journey into Surrey. The beautiful country through which she was passing, might, one would think, have done something towards softening a heart prematurely hardened ; but to judge by the cold, unvaried expression that sat upon her fine features, it had little influence over hers. The open country, glowing beneath a cloudless sky, or the soft shade of overhanging boughs that occasionally intercepted that gorgeous sunshine, and shed the charm of a sweet obscurity over the more secluded ways, various as were the beauties of the road, they remained apparently unmarked or unappreciated. No answering smile assimilated her young face with the common rejoicings of nature—no rising tear, the evidence of a holier and more tender joy, moistened the eyelid which was listlessly raised to that leafy screen. An artist would have

decided that the lady possessed no taste for landscape painting ; yet the less rural objects which diversified the journey served no better to arrest her attention. There were the habitations of man in their endless variety, quaint little roadside inns, villages with all their rustic concomitants, even the least picturesque of the country towns through which she was passing, even of these, each had some association connected with it—mean, ludicrous, or grotesque—sufficient surely to have excited her attention. But no ; the fair and contemplative traveller saw every thing with the same cold eye, a look which partook chiefly of indifference, save when it became tinctured with a symptom of positive disgust.

And yet it was difficult to look at Miss Palliser's intellectual face, and believe that the heart which beat below it was really (as she told her friend) incapable of a lively and natural emotion. There is another hypothesis which we hazard reluctantly, inasmuch as it would seem to augur ill for the future connubial felicity of an excellent man and experienced officer, Colonel Hussey of the Royal Artillery ; for, taking for granted that the brain of his fair intended was not wholly stultified, and her heart, as people say, in the right place, where was that full measure of hope and bounding gratitude, of budding love and gay anticipation, which should have enlivened her intelligent features, enhancing seven—ten—nay, a hundred-fold the merit of each passing scene and incident ?

As the young lady's journey drew to its close, these signs of a discontent more than ordinary, palpably in-

creased ; especially during the last stage, some mental nausea seemed to arise at the sight of every good-looking country-seat that came in view, whether such building stood proudly aloof from the highway, with the imposing adjuncts of semi-park and shrubberies, or looked comfortably down upon her from the verge of the road over its substantial wall and iron gates. Either the Colonel had failed to specify the situation and sort of place to which he was introducing her, or, trying to do so, had been deficient in his graphic detail. The house, when reached at last, contradicted all her pre-conceptions, being built not in the open country, but in the High-street of the county town. Had it not been for the unmistakeable image of her lover himself, appearing at the open door as her vehicle drew up to it, she would certainly have directed the driver to pass by. There, however, stood her faithful friend in advance of the servants, and certain members of the household seen dimly in the background ; for with that delicate regard to her feelings, in which he was never deficient, Colonel Hussey had made a point of hurrying from London, where business was then detaining him, that he might personally present Miss Palliser to his relations, and thus obviate the awkwardness of a first arrival amongst persons entirely unknown to her. With any deeper repugnance on her part to a meeting with the Divets he was as yet unacquainted. This unexpected rencontre proved, as the Colonel intended, a very agreeable surprise, causing Miss Palliser to alight with an alacrity unusual to her ; and never, as he warmly greeted and kindly

saluted her, had she felt, perhaps, so entirely and unreservedly glad to see him, or so nearly disposed to return the kiss with which he welcomed her to Etheridge.

Colonel Hussey, by the by, was not much in the habit of kissing Miss Palliser—some people even thought him a little remiss in this respect; but the Colonel had a high opinion of women, and he would have considered it a very indecorous infringement on the dignity of the sex, if he had offered to salute his betrothed on every frivolous pretext that might present itself. Exclusive of high and solemn occasions, such as birthdays, including that of the reigning sovereign (but *not* those of her descendants), all the greater festivals of the Calendar, and the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot (these were extras)—and excepting these, we have reasons for supposing that he never even attempted such a thing, taking the average more than once a-week. I say “on the average;” but I have heard, though loth to vouch for a fact which it would be difficult formally to substantiate, that these marks of irrepressible tenderness usually took place on a Saturday night. Why this particular time should have been chosen remains a mystery up to the present hour; my informant on this point, though pretty confident as to the fact, remaining in other respects quite as ignorant as myself. Now, there is a good old glee which begins by demanding soberly, “What is the properest day to drink?” but proceeds to answer the question by naming in succession each day of the week as being alike adapted to the purpose. It is plain that Colonel Hussey, supposing him to have been ever so well acquainted with that

celebrated and jovial composition, could never have contemplated applying its lax principle to another species of self-indulgence, much quicker in the operation than the imbibing of spirituous liquors, hot or cold, and often no less intoxicating. Perhaps (for that very word intoxicating may afford us a clue to the Colonel's reasoning on this subject) he might have thought it too dangerous an experiment to be lightly ventured on till he had quite made up his mind to it. Had he been a Calvinist, he might have been suspected of hurrying over every description of worldly amusement on the Saturday night, in order that the Sunday should be kept sacred from things frivolous and unnecessary; or, supposing him a Romanist, one would naturally conclude that the week's abstinence was either a penance self-inflicted, or required by his priest; if of the Jewish persuasion, he certainly would have restrained his feelings till the setting of his Sabbath sun; but, being none of these, the religious scruples by which they might have been actuated cannot apply to him. Again, a friend of mine, kindly interested in a subject which he perceives to be puzzling to me, and himself a little afraid of ghosts, conjectures that the Colonel was possibly superstitious, and so might have dreamed that it would be unlucky to kiss Miss Palliser on any day but Saturday, or to omit doing it then! But my friend never saw Colonel Hussey, or such a notion could scarcely have entered his head; he could not have observed that gentleman's clear grey eye, or the reflecting brow which surmounted it, and have associated their possessor with the sort of disposition

likely to be affected by omens, good or bad, winding-sheets in the candle, or death-watches ticking in the corner. No, we may turn and twist the subject as we will, and end, if it so pleases us, by referring every thing to the Colonel's "idiosyncrasy," but round we must come to the same point at last—if the thing was as it was reported, why should it be? Why did Colonel Hussey salute Miss Palliser only of a Saturday night? And upon this question depends an after-thought, which may save the preceding remarks from being classed as merely an idle digression, impertinent to the Colonel and useless to the reader; for, supposing the enamoured officer to have displayed in this eccentric fashion his love of order and punctuality, one is tempted to speculate further, and to wonder whether Miss Palliser would have written to her Norfolk cousin in quite the same misanthropical strain if he had now and then transgressed the rigidity of the rule? and whether earth's surface might not have worn a blithesomer aspect as she passed over it? and lastly, whether even the Divets themselves, inheritors of a name most abhorrent to her ears, might not have seemed a remarkably good sort of a family, instead of being regarded in a spirit of cold distrust? A guest entirely unprejudiced, would undoubtedly have given them such a character on first acquaintance; and even Miss Palliser was prepossessed in their favour, by the hearty greeting which met her at the very entrance of their house, which, while she justly attributed it to her engagement with Colonel Hussey, seemed notwithstanding to evince their hospitable tendencies.

In the hall she was met by Mr. Divet, a gentleman with a very red face, who came bustling out of the drawing-room at the sound of her approach, calling as he advanced upon the daughter, who was close behind him and equally ready to do the honours of the house of which she officiated as mistress. In her the complexion of the father was softened down, and the bustling liveliness tempered to a less obtrusive activity ; but what she had lost by descent in one particular, she had considerably gained in another : her father, though far from being dull of aspect, could not compete with Mrs. Barclay in shrewdness of countenance. To this expression a remarkably wide mouth afforded every convenient facility : a smaller orifice might have been more becoming, but it would not have done half the work she put upon it in the same space of time, or have done that work half so well. Observe that, ye beauties who pride yourselves on mouths of the buttonhole species ! Be ye content with whatsoever charms lie on the surface of your faces, and leave expression to the coarser-featured ; or, if still ambitious in that line, and not to be deterred from screwing your pretty little features to attain the desired end, be assured that all your delicate grimacing would be put to shame by the slightest inflection of such a mouth as Mrs. George Barclay's, so was the lady called.

“ Now, Miss Palliser,” said Mr. Divet after the first civilities had been exchanged, offers of refreshment courteously made and promptly declined, and the young lady disencumbered of her travelling dress,—“ Now,

ma'm," and he gently but determinately handed her to the drawing-room door, which opened immediately upon the hall, "I am going to take upon me the very great pleasure of introducing you to nine-and-twenty of our near relations !"

"Nine-and-twenty Divets !" an involuntary shudder passed over the fair guest he was so politely escorting. True it was, the speaker was a very different person from what she had surmised, and she was fast losing sight of that tall, spare, smooth-spoken lawyer, her favourite conception in regard to all who bore the name of Divet,—still he *was* a Divet, and here, ye gods, were nine-and-twenty more of them ! A glance within the large apartment into which she was being ushered, was enough to convince Miss Palliser that the fact, disagreeable as it might be, was in no degree exaggerated : she could not count them on so short a notice, but had not a doubt of her informant's arithmetic.

As the company were all in evening dresses, Miss Palliser would have divined what was really the case, that she had arrived in the midst of a large dinner-party, a family feast ; but, struck with the word "relations," she asked herself could it mean that these people were all living there as members of one household ? It was but the conjecture of the moment ; for Mrs. Barclay, with a beaming smile, the very essence of joy and contentment, followed up her father's speech by saying, "The presence of yourself and our dear cousin Benjamin is particularly grateful to us to-day, Miss Palliser—this day, of all others, we would not have had you absent from us on any

account. Do you know, Ben," turning to Colonel Hussey, "I cannot help thinking there is something more than mere chance in your fixing on the thirteenth of June to come amongst us. Oh, I don't mind your incredulous look!"

"Incredulous!" cried her father; "why, it's evident—it is self-evident: there can be no reasonable doubt of it! Providence is at the bottom of every thing; we all acknowledge that, you know, Mrs. Mudge?" and turning round he appealed to somebody somewhere. "Yes, I look upon it as a certainty that Providence has done it all. But where's Priscilla? I don't see my niece Priscilla—Priscilla, my dear, where are you?" and he bustled off to bring up another of his family to welcome Miss Palliser. "Yes, really," Mrs. Barclay continued, "I must venture to think there must be something more than ordinary in your coming to us just on what I am sure we may be allowed to call a solemn as well as a joyful occasion. Mayn't I, dear cousin Mudge?" and she also appealed to an elderly person standing near, who was attired in a cap of a much plainer style than the generality of the provincial excrescences which figured on the heads of most of the married ladies present. "Don't you think, ma'm, that, with all the delightful reflections we associate with this day, we must still call it a solemn meeting?"

"If you do name it as such, Kezia, I will be the last to say you nay; for I find it a sweet, and a holy, and a blessed thing to attend on such an occasion, and to assist at the honouring of grey hairs."

"Yes, I know we think in common on most points, and especially on this. I must explain to you, Miss

Palliser, that this gathering together of our kith and kindred (our clan, as we should call it in Scotland) is for the purpose of celebrating the birthday of our patriarch, for so we venture to term him."

"And truly may he so be named!" sighed the old lady.

"Our dear good old grandfather," pursued Mrs. Barclay. "His birthday—his ninetieth anniversary! Fancy that, Miss Palliser! have we not reason to congratulate ourselves? The dear old man's ninetieth birthday! Yes, whatever the Colonel may say to the contrary, I shall always think that there was something more than ordinary in your both fixing on this day of all others to come to us; for he assures me that, in naming the thirteenth, he had quite forgotten what a memorable lay it was for us, and all connected with our family."

Mrs. Barclay was interrupted by her cousin, a genteel-looking young woman in a widow's dress, who, as she saluted Miss Palliser, took up the same strain in a gentle, whining voice. "If any thing could increase the fulness of our pleasure on this sweet anniversary, it must be the unexpected presence of our dear Colonel Hussey, and the lady we are all so anxious to be acquainted with. Grandpapa will be so glad to see you;" and she looked into Maria's face with the most confiding softness—"the *venerable* grandpapa!"

Miss Palliser uttered, in reply, a few low words, of whose purport she had herself but a very confused notion. A growing antipathy to every member of that large assembly caused her to look round for Colonel

Hussey, and to perceive with pleasure that he was standing close beside her. But even in that quarter her pleasurable expectations were to be damped; not that he was less kind or deserving of all trust and confidence, but it had so happened that, from the almost isolated condition in which she was living during her acquaintance with him, and the very private way in which their courtship had been carried on, she had scarcely ever till then seen her lover in company, much less encircled, as he now appeared, by the endearing ties and enlivening familiarities of family life, and—for the truth must be told—she did not think him improved by this change in his circumstances. He had wooed her almost in solitude—had won her to his suit by respectful attentions (*very* respectful, as we are aware); it was his calm self-possessed demeanour which had attracted her esteem, and she had never contemplated the possibility of his manner becoming altered; but exactly in the same measured step and deliberate voice in which he was wont to visit her, and say, evening after evening, “Maria, my love, how do you feel yourself to-day?”—precisely thus did she reckon on seeing him pass on in quiet dignity, till death should end their married life, and put the finishing stroke to his characteristic placidity. And now to see him in the midst of these people—the men so loud and boisterous, the women so pert, so underbred—smiling at their jokes, parrying or returning their familiar raillery, and answering to the name of “Ben!”—she felt as if she hardly recognised him under this new and unexpected aspect.

She had long been aware of many points on which they were far from agreeing ; but as yet their difference of opinion had never caused any diminution in her respect and consideration for Colonel Hussey. Strange, inscrutable workings of the human heart ! It was almost with indifference that she had heard her lover avow his belief of many of the most important tenets of religion, the truth or beauty of which her bewildered mind had ever refused to recognise ; and on political matters she knew their sentiments to be diametrically opposed, the Colonel being the very soul of loyalty, in the now almost obsolete sense of the word, while she, under the influence of her unhappy uncle, and the books of a library selected by him, had imbibed certain hard, revolutionary principles, and in the depths of her secret, silent musings, worshipped many an historical character, and many a celebrity of the *Hustings* or the *Tribune*, whom he held in utter abhorrence. But their discrepancy on questions which usually excite the dullest intellect and the gentlest temper, had occasioned Miss Palliser but little uneasiness. The more important were the subjects agitated between them, so much the more strenuously did she check the utterance of her own opinions, and retire within herself, cherishing in secrecy the wanderings of her unbelief or the intensity of her convictions. Contented to know that her future husband was in the main a good and well-intentioned person, she had heard him quote many a maxim which in her heart she denied and derided, without thinking at all the worse of him for it ; she had even coolness and candour

enough to perceive that his opinions were in such strict harmony with his plain soldier-like bearing, that his character would altogether have suffered—in consistency at least—by his adopting opinions more consonant to her own. When the slight heat of debate had gone down—she never fanned it to a dangerous height—she would scarcely, on calm consideration, have raised a finger to have made him otherwise than he was. And now—just because the poor man laughed when he used to be grave, and met the kindly demonstrations of his friends with corresponding cheerfulness—he had all at once sunk—she felt that it was so—many degrees in her estimation.

We seek not to justify what may seem the idle movements of female caprice—we may presume that the governing impulse of the lady's mind was unamiable enough: yet in this word "caprice," which we use so lightly, how much lies hidden that never will and never can come to light—how many deep-seated emotions are implicated in its manifestation, in the sudden and apparently causeless clouding of a man's brow, and the pouting of a woman's lip! The most candid and self-discerning of us never apply this vague term to our own case; we always think *we* have reason good for our discontent, however sulky and snappish it may show itself,—not so in our presumptuous judgment of our neighbour. Forthwith we pronounce *him* surly and unreasonable—*her*, silly and capricious; but because we cannot analyze the complication of feelings, touching perhaps on the best as well as the worst, the nobler no less than the meaner passions, which often tend to ruffle the forehead of the one and

excite the quivering in the lip of the other. It may be that *he* is simply a bear, and *she* a baby. What then ? the feelings of the baby may be matter of deep interest to its guardian angel—and as for the bear, poor fellow ! who can conjecture what *he* is thinking of, when he gives us an unexpected roar ?

CHAPTER VII.

BLIND-MAN'S-BUFF.

IN the course of the evening, and when, after changing her dress, Miss Palliser returned to the company, she heard, with a mixture of disgust and curiosity, that the elder Mr. Divet was coming into the drawing-room to receive the congratulations of his friends. She had hoped his great age would have kept him invisible, and that, while she remained at Etheridge, he might have seemed to her but as a sort of myth in the family, or living tradition, to be worshipped unseen, except by his very nearest of kin; but ere long a slight bustle without, and an air of expectation within the room, gave signals of his approach. Mrs. Mudge folded her hands and prepared to be ecstatic; sentimental looks were exchanged, and various short sentences and texts of Scripture, in allusion to age and excellence, were bandied about between other portions of the assembly. For a moment Miss Palliser's constitutional caution deserted her, and with a flashing eye she turned to speak to Colonel Hussey—to inquire if he could tell her where lay the extraordinary merit of living out nearly a century? but she found that he had left her side, being gone to offer his arm to his

venerable friend. And presently the little group appeared; the old man with one hand on the Colonel's arm, the other resting on the shoulder of his son, though so slightly was his tall figure bent by years, that it seemed to the unsympathizing Maria as if he availed himself of their support rather for the purpose of theatrical effect than from any necessity of assistance.

Except the grey hair and wrinkles, there was little about Jesse Divet to denote his uncommon longevity. The hearing quick as ever, the eye, still acute and intelligent, travelled from one friend to another, recognizing each of the nine-and-twenty as they swarmed respectfully around him, and his memory never faltering at a name when he addressed them individually; once only excepted, when, deceived by the shortness of her petticoats, he addressed Miss Anna Maria Mudge for her brother Tommy—and even that single mistake was concluded, by those who knew the old man best, to be more ironical than real.

And now Miss Palliser, good as *her* memory was also, and but too faithful to the past, could not help confessing that it was a striking scene; as the old man, being led to the upper end of the room, and placed in his large easy-chair, sat there, the subject of apparent love and veneration to his numerous and respectable-looking family; for as such, taking them in the mass, they might well be accounted. Preoccupied, however, with the sense of old injuries, scarcely defined yet felt to be most real, the new guest lacked that impression of sincerity in the whole performance, which, whether on

or off the stage, alone stamps upon such scenes their true amount of worth.

“I cannot tell you how I felt”—it was thus she described to Miss Ainsworth the events of her first evening at the Divets—“to see this person, the only being, I can truly affirm, towards whom I have ever felt an emotion like hatred, thus worshipped (I can call it nothing less) as a pattern of virtue and holiness; his entrance hailed by a murmur of respectful adulation; his relations bending upon him a sort of devotional gaze, some of the women even shedding tears—or seeming to do so—as they brought their little children to his knees, that he might bless them; and again the word patriarch was repeated, as, acting the character of family priest, the old man laid his shrivelled hands on the little creatures, and uttered a short prayer over them—imploping temporal and spiritual blessings for ever, and that they might ‘tread the paths of duty, and grow up replenished with every grace of goodness and piety.’ His eyes were raised to heaven, but though the voice was devotional—any one can imitate that—the eyes were *not*. I noticed that, as they wandered over the ceiling, they gleamed with much the same legal sharpness that had struck me on his first approach; and as, in the course of his exhortation, he coupled our duty to God with that towards our neighbour, another voice, plainer still, seemed to whisper in my ear—‘that old rogue, Jesse Divet—that precious scoundrel of a lawyer!’ and then, Lucy, as I watched his daughter and niece, the pictures of affluence and self-satisfaction, leaning over his chair, and arranging its

soft velvet cushions, my thoughts wandered to those two faded women, my poor old aunts, whom this man had helped to ruin—can you wonder if I am bitter in my feelings, or find my heart recoil from this house, and all that it contains?

“I wish the Colonel had been aware of what is passing in my mind; now it is too late. Prepossessed as he is in favour of his relations, it would serve no purpose to acquaint him with my impressions; but it is evident he can have no penetration into character, or he could not—I am sure he could not—like them so well. Well, for one thing I am thankful, that at least there are no Husseys among them; the Colonel's connection with these people being only by marriage, and really very slight. But there are Barclays and Mudges in abundance; think of that, Lucy! My mother was a Pelham, though a poor one, and her daughter must be cousin to a Mudge!”

With these strong prejudices working within her, Miss Palliser shrank from attracting the personal notice of the elder Divet, whom, but for the consideration due to Colonel Hussey, she would have shunned effectually, by resorting to her sleeping-room, and quitting it no more that night. But her position in the family rendered her too prominent to be long overlooked; her lover, at least, was not likely to forget her, and in his eyes it was a privilege to be counted already as a daughter of the house, and to be blessed amongst the rest of its children. He waited, therefore, with his looks turned benignantly upon her, as much as to say, “How my Maria must be

enjoying a scene like this!" till the little excitement caused by Mr. Divet's entrance had subsided, the children been disposed of, and the company were assuming their former state of quiescence. Then, drawing near her, he said, "I am longing to present you to my good old friend." "No, no—not now!" she whispered, shrinking back; but he, utterly misinterpreting her reluctance, counselled her encouragingly to discard her "amiable timidity," urging that, "where all were united in one common bond of social amity, there could be no need to fear."—"Fear! *She* afraid—and afraid of old Divet!" She gave him her hand with a look of defiance; but we must conclude, with the young lady herself, that her lover, with all his good qualities, was not a person of quick discernment, not apt at least in the reading of countenances; for the change in hers passed wholly unperceived by him. She was still the "sweet Maria" he had ever considered her, and he led her forward with an air of infinite content, and much internal pride; for he felt that his choice could do him no discredit with Mr. Divet, who, some sixty years ago, had enjoyed the reputation of gallantry, and whose eyes were not grown so dim but that they could discern the points of a pretty woman yet.

The old man accordingly received Miss Palliser with a mixture of paternal kindness and old-fashioned courtesy that sat well upon him, alluding, but not in a marked or indelicate manner, to the circumstances which brought her into his family; and adding, jocosely, that though he had always accounted himself "a fortunate

old fellow," he was that evening more than ever convinced of his singular good-luck ; for, unless he had lived to complete his ninety-first year, he must have gone out of the world without having enjoyed the great gratification of seeing his dear friend and relation, Colonel Hussey's intended bride.

It is difficult for a woman, under any circumstances, to remain insensible to a compliment. Greatly as Miss Palliser disliked the head of the family, she was insensibly growing a little—a very little—softened towards him, as his look and manner evinced the satisfaction with which he was regarding her, when the old gentleman spoiled all by adverting to her father. Thinking to gratify her—for it was only natural that what had seemed the height of professional atrocity to the sufferers in that old lawsuit, should to him appear a common transaction, all in the way of business—he mentioned having formerly, "in the good old times," had the pleasure of Mr. Palliser's acquaintance, "when you, my dear, were quite a little girl. Like all old people I lose my memory for daily events ; but I have still a faithful remembrance of your good father, for we had some transactions in common, though you, of course, were too young to have cognizance of them."

"By no means, sir," was the prompt and steady reply. "I have a clear recollection of the circumstances you allude to. The name of Divet is familiar to me as one of my earliest remembrances, for I have heard it mentioned by both my parents, as well as the Misses Pelham and others of my mother's family"—and the eyes of Miss

Palliser, which had modestly sunk under the flattering observation of the "Patriarch," were lifted boldly at this mention of the "good old times," and rested on his with a searching gaze, which, in penetration and keenness, might have vied with that of old Jesse himself, when his sight was like a hawk's, and his practice of the keenest description. By the time this little speech of hers was concluded, they understood each other perfectly, each being conscious of the mutual intelligence; but it served as additional proof to Miss Palliser, that this old persecutor of the Pelhams was steeped to the very ears in knavery, that he seemed vastly more amused than disconcerted at the reproach her looks were intended to convey; for his glance did not quail for a moment, and he returned her observation with a quiet chuckle, which made her hate him more than ever.

"Well, sir," said Colonel Hussey, as soon as his betrothed had retired a little, and an opportunity occurred of his speaking unheard by *more* than half a dozen dear relations, "and now you must tell me what you think of my Maria—your candid opinion, of course." Secure of a favourable reply—for he, too, had narrowly watched old Jesse's countenance during the previous introduction—the Colonel smiled placidly as he leaned on the broad arm of Mr. Divet's chair.

"She does you credit, Ben," said the old man; "I haven't seen a finer girl for many a day. A graceful carriage and a good address, too—ay! and a will of her own into the bargain, and I don't think the worse of her for that either."

“What, my Maria? The meekest, gentlest being upon earth, sir! If she has a fault, it is the being too complying, and almost too easily led by those whose opinion she values.”

“Ha! and so that’s the case,” rejoined the other, with an incredulity lying perdue in every deep-set wrinkle, that even the Colonel could not misinterpret. “Too much of the dove, is she, pretty dear? Well, do you know, Benjamin, I in my ignorance took it to be rather the other way—humph!” and he peered with sarcastic good-humour into Colonel Hussey’s face. “But you, of *course*, cannot be mistaken on such a point, and it must be I that am out of my reckoning—eh, Colonel?”

“Why, considering how much better I am acquainted with the lady, sir,” the Colonel began with some pique, while his old friend went on in the same jeering tone—

“To be sure, to be sure! What should I know about it, a poor drivelling old fellow, without eyesight or understanding left? Ha, ha! and *you*, Benjamin—*you* are a lover! Eh, my dear? Ha, ha, ha! Such knowing chaps these gentlemen in love—up to every thing, eh? Isn’t it so, cousin Sally, and hasn’t it been so from Samson downwards to the present moment?”

The person appealed to by Mr. Divet was a vulgar but sagacious-looking old woman, who crossed the room as he was speaking, munching a huge piece of cake, and talking with her mouth full. As she caught the sound of her name, Mrs. Sarah Barclay stopped short, and, setting her arms akimbo, replied to her venerable

cousin in these unceremonious terms, "What's that you say, you old scapegrace?"

"We are talking about the tender passion," said old Divet, in a low mocking voice. "Lovers are never made fools of by a pretty face; such things are quite unknown, ha, ha! They are all such sharp dogs, a'n't they, Sally?"

Now the Colonel tried to join frankly in the laugh that was raised at his expense, and succeeded on the whole tolerably well; but he said in his heart, that he had never seen the poor old gentleman display such evident signs of senility as he was doing that evening, and he hoped that, if Mr. Divet *was* becoming positively childish, the family would manage to keep him in his own apartment, and prevent his degenerating into a public nuisance. But the Colonel had a powerful ally in the person of Mrs. Sarah, or cousin Sally, as she was commonly called in the family. Facing round upon the patriarch, and putting another piece of cake into her mouth, she commenced her attack upon him:—"And what business has an old worn-out scarecrow like you to give your opinion on love matters, I should like to know? Tender passion, indeed! Why, let me see! on a moderate reckoning, it must be sixty years at least since you knew any thing of the matter. No, no, Master Divet, leave that sort of thing to the Colonel, and Tom Mudge, and the rest of the young chaps, not forgetting Ned Barclay here;" and she pointed to a very ancient gentleman, who, from the vacant laugh with which he applauded her jokes, seemed fast approaching that

second infancy which the Colonel imputed to old Divet, but of which *his* ninety years in fact shewed not a single trace. "Ah! you may snigger as much as you please, Master Jesse; but Ned's a chicken compared to you, for the young thing was only sixty-nine last birthday, and for that matter a deuced deal more harmless than you ever were, or ever will be; for, though he *was* articed to a lawyer, he ran away, as an honest boy should do, before he had served out half his time. Didn't you, cousin Neddy? and I honour you for it, too. No, no! he gave you all the slip, above and below stairs too, and you may take your davy upon it that he sleeps all the sounder for that; while you are tossing and tumbling upon your bed, soft as it is, counting up how many pockets you have helped to pick in the course of the last century, and how many widows and orphans you have made a meal of, just as I swallow this bit of plum-cake. I say, you old shark of an attorney, do you hear what I am telling you?"

The old man held up his long skeleton fingers as if to crave quarter. "I should be mighty hard of hearing if I did not," he replied. "Why, you old virago, do you take me to be as deaf as Manley Frere, that you hallo in my ear at such a rate?"

"Ah, that poor young fellow!" said Mrs. Sally, changing her tone and looking round her. "Where has he hid himself, I wonder? I have hardly seen him all day long."

"His spirits are by no means what we could wish them to be," Mrs. George Barclay chimed in, desirous

of turning the discourse into a more decorous channel ; for though cousin Sally, with a will determined in the moral, but *undetermined* in the legal sense of the word, was licensed to say what she chose amongst the relations who knew her peculiarities and the length of her purse, her unbridled vulgarity became very painful to the daughters of the house whenever there was a stranger in company. Colonel Hussey, who had known the old lady all his life, understood and tolerated her ways, but she was a novelty to his bride-elect ; so the ladies, conscious that Miss Palliser was within hearing, followed up the subject of “ poor Mr. Frere ” as one of the safest they could hit upon. “ We wished him to join us, for we are all *very* anxious about him, but he is hardly equal to general society yet. He made a point, however, of seeing grandpapa this morning to congratulate him ; and very charmingly he expressed himself, poor man ! Did he not, Priscilla ? ”

“ Sweetly, sweetly ! ” murmured the widow, “ but he does every thing well.”

“ Yes—*poor* Mr. Frere ! ” said her grandfather, in a tone of mock commiseration, screwing his mouth on one side, and fixing the Colonel with his deep-set eyes. “ A sad tale that love story of his ! Have you heard it, Benjamin ? have they told it you, eh, my dear ? First he loses his hearing, and then he loses—ha, ha, poor young fellow !—he loses his sweetheart ! He has been jilted,” jerking out the word with most provoking emphasis—“ jilted, Colonel, do you hear ? Lovers never *are* at fault, we know ; yes, we all know what cunning

rogues they are, every one of them ! Yet somehow it happened, you see, that poor deaf Manley Frere was for once an exception to the golden rule," and all who were gathered round the old man's chair joined in the laugh with which he finished speaking.

Colonel Hussey also forced a smile, though really feeling half-choked with rage, and only observed, as he walked off to join his betrothed, "Never fear, sir ; whenever I am afflicted like your unfortunate friend, I will expect to share his fate in other respects ; but till then I shall make myself quite easy."

"Is she mad ?" inquired Miss Palliser as the Colonel approached her ; for such a specimen as Mrs. Sarah Barclay had never fallen in her way before, and she did not know what to make of it. "Is that old lady quite in her right senses ?"

"It's my firm belief, Maria, that they are all mad together!" replied the Colonel waspishly ; "and, at all events, Bedlam would be the fittest place for that old woman. She grows insufferable ! How the family can endure her passes my conception."

"Does it ?" said somebody who overheard him. "I am surprised at that."

"Well, George," replied the Colonel, "if I do guess the reason she is tolerated, it does not increase my respect for her, or for those who encourage such a violation of decorum."

The person to whom Colonel Hussey was speaking was a young man of a sickly though not ungenteel appearance, who for upwards of an hour had been leaning

listlessly against the chimney-piece, without taking the smallest apparent interest in what was going forward. Shortly after Miss Palliser's entrance, he had been mentioned to her as the husband of Mrs. George Barclay, somewhat to Maria's surprise, as he was evidently that lady's junior by some years.

"I should not recommend her to Miss Palliser or any other young lady as a model in point of manners," he observed languidly; "but I can't consent to your shutting up cousin Sally in a public or a private asylum just yet. Do what you will with the rest of my relations, but I stand up for her; she's rather a favourite of mine," and, yawning slightly, Mr. Barclay put his hands into his pockets and moved leisurely away.

"That is rather an odd person, too, is he not?" asked Miss Palliser.

"Ah—poor young man!" replied the Colonel, still speaking with some irritation; for, like many quiet people, Miss Palliser's lover when once excited did not easily recover his good-humour. "Yes—he *is* peculiar, as you say, and good reason he has for being so! This is a sad, sad world we are placed in, my dear girl, and, as we wander through its thorny ways, we are doomed to encounter many a creature ruined by circumstances, and many an aching heart which, but for the misconduct of others, might have been the abode of peace and happiness!" saying which, the Colonel slipped Maria's arm under his, and took a turn or two about that end of the room which was farthest from the position of the patriarch and his particular audience; the meditative

promenade embracing by degrees the hall beyond the drawing-room, that portion of the house being by comparison cool and empty, and also still *more* remote from the venerable individual above mentioned.

Miss Palliser and the colonel of artillery had been so accustomed in the course of their courtship to fall into a moralizing strain, that she felt no sort of surprise at the style in which he was now entertaining her. It chimed in aptly enough with her own reflections, and reminded her of old times—not the “*good* old times ;” she left that epithet to the senior Divet: old or new, the times had never been *good* to her, poor thing ! So now it occurred to her as perfectly natural that, in choosing a topic wherewith to beguile the fleeting hours, and send her to bed in a fitting frame of mind, the Colonel should have hit upon a piece of family history of the gloomiest and most lamentable character. We may briefly relate the story, which he enlarged upon at greater length ; viz., that this George Barclay, who had for some years been husband to Mr. David Divet’s eldest daughter, had been originally attached to another of his cousins (for the sake of the romance, which should if possible adhere to an affair of true love, we will add that the fair relative in question was a Barclay and not a Mudge), and as long as he seemed likely to remain a poor man all his life, the attachment met with no discouragement from the friends on either side.

In an evil hour, however, young Barclay quitted the neighbourhood of his beloved to seek a fortune ; which, unhappily for his own good, he found, as it were, ready

made for him. In those days his manners were gentlemanlike and prepossessing, and the merchant with whom he was placed took so great a fancy to him, that, being childless, he adopted him as his son, and, dying a few years afterwards, left him in possession of a handsome independence. But when the young man returned to his native town, and claimed the hand of his cousin Grace, he found her prejudiced against him, and on the eve of marriage with another—a rich man, but old enough to have been her father.

“Turn your head a little,” said the Colonel as he came to this part of his story, “and you will see the person I allude to. There, to the right—that unwieldy figure with the bloated face and coarse features, who sits with his foot upon a stool, for he was a martyr to the gout when the poor girl married him.”

“He has been my particular aversion ever since I entered the room,” was Maria’s rejoinder. “It is his wife, I suppose, who sits near him? She is pretty still, and the sullenness of her expression is easily accounted for with such a companion by her side. But what could induce her to sacrifice herself to such a man?”

“Ah! there lies the mystery, Maria; between ourselves,” and the narrator of this disagreeable piece of family history subdued his voice as he continued it, “I more than suspect our venerable friend in the easy-chair there, of not being quite irreproachable with regard to this young couple. From some pretty broad hints which have occasionally fallen from Mrs. Sarah (with all her oddnesses she is an open-hearted person and

detests underhand measures), and from what has escaped her at various times, I cannot help fearing that some very questionable means were resorted to, to separate Grace Barclay and poor George. But, however that might be, the sacrifice *was* completed, and he, irritated by what he was persuaded to believe a mere heartless desertion on the part of his first love, gave way to that foolish spirit of bravado which so often possesses people under trials of this description, and so the affair ended by his rushing into matrimony with his cousin, Kezia Divet. The truth is, it was not thought desirable that his fortune should go out of the family, and Kezia had already passed the prime of her youth, and was naturally anxious for an establishment. Mrs. George, though she never had the beauty of Grace, has far more ability, and at first seemed to be acquiring considerable influence over her young husband; but this did not last long. Whether he simply grew tired of a quiet life, or discovered (which I suspect to be the case) that some unjustifiable deception had been practised to dispose of him and his ill-fated riches, the end of it was that he grew reckless, fell into all manner of bad courses, took to horse-racing—gambling—drinking, and I know not what besides; and now, having ruined his constitution and run through every penny he could call his own, he is living as a dependent pauper, you may call it, upon his wife's property and the hospitality of her family. Poor George! I believe I am the only one beside that wonder of yours, cousin Sally, who has any compassion for him; but pity him I do most sincerely. There he is,

broken in spirit, soured in temper, too listless to exert himself, or attempt a more independent course of life, yet with enough sensibility left him still to feel the degradation of his condition. Living amongst a set of thriving relations, the one black sheep of the fold ; and yet, to my thinking, like another fallen creature described in a certain proverb, not altogether so black, poor fellow ! as it is the fashion to paint him.”

Miss Palliser listened attentively to a piece of private history which served to justify her almost instinctive repugnance to the family with whom she saw herself for the present associated. Nor was this anecdote, though perhaps the most important, the only one to which Colonel Hussey treated her.

Passing in and out of the drawing-room as they promenaded the length of the ground-floor, and availing themselves of the change of atmosphere afforded by the hall and adjacent parlours, the Colonel could conveniently illustrate his facts by pointing out to her special notice the persons and parties to whom they referred.

“ There, Maria, you see that little man in the white waistcoat, and the attempt at a moustache—horrid taste at all times in a civilian ! ”

“ Yes, as unpleasant-looking as the lady in blue satin, with whom he is laughing so vociferously—Is she his wife ? ”

“ His wife ! ” said the Colonel with a shrug. “ No, no—it is not often he and his wife appear in such close conjunction. We must look for the lady—the mistress of his house and the mother of *his* children (here was

another half-suppressed sneer) in quite an opposite corner of the room, I fancy. Yes, I thought so; there she sits, half-shaded by the window-curtain, and Joseph Mudge in close proximity. *Captain* Mudge, as they call him. Nothing but the retired master of an Indiaman, or some such thing, and he persists in keeping the title of captain!"

"Is it wrong, then?" asked Miss Palliser, who was wholly ignorant of professional niceties, and had little anxiety to be better informed; though this was likely, nevertheless, to be shortly the case, supposing her inclined to attend to the elaborate exposition of naval and military etiquette into which the queen's officer immediately entered. But, ere he had fairly embarked on the subject, a shrill maternal voice exclaimed, "Oh, Colonel Hussey, for goodness' sake be careful of Wilhelmina!" and a lady rushed forward to extricate a four-years' old Mudge, which had entangled itself between the officer's legs and the flowing drapery of his mistress. "My child—my precious poppet! has the naughty man hurt it?"

Of course the hint was not lost upon the "precious poppet," which instantly set up such a howling as caused the Colonel to remark that, in *his* opinion, "the little creature should have been put to bed at least two hours ago," and, though the child's mama did *not* happen to overhear the observation, its maternal aunt *did*; and from that moment may be educed the leading motive which caused this portion of the Mudge connection to be the only branch of Colonel Hussey's family that was

ever known to impugn, in the slightest degree, his talents and conduct as an officer, and his manners as a gentleman.

This trifling incident did not tend to the restoration of the Colonel's equanimity ; so that his strictures on the company in the drawing-room grew not a whit more lenient than heretofore. Miss Palliser, happening to notice approvingly the dress and appearance of one of the ladies, he repeated her remark with considerable irony.

"Good looking ? Well dressed ? What, Mrs. Philip Barclay ? Oh, no doubt of that ! Mrs. Philip is a person who will contrive to dress well under all possible circumstances. She and her little ones form, as you say, quite a picturesque group. And yet you would hardly suspect, Maria, with all their lace and frippery, that that branch of the Barclays has been twice on the very brink of bankruptcy, only kept out of the gazette by the help and exertions of the Divets."

"Your friends, then, are not incapable of a kind action sometimes ?"

"Incapable ! Very far from it, I assure you ; they are noted for their friendliness and liberality, and the Philip Barclays have every cause to be grateful ; for I have never given credit to a word that was whispered on that occasion—I know our good friends here too well."

Miss Palliser looked up inquiringly. "Why, I have heard it hinted," and the Colonel sank his voice still lower, "that the means employed to extricate them from their

embarrassments, bordered rather more on usury than one likes to think of amongst relations, so that they are now bound hand and foot, as one may say, to the Divets. But I beg your pardon, you were asking some questions ? ”

“ I only wanted to know the name of that man in spectacles, who is playing so good-naturedly with the children ? There is something pleasant in his countenance, plain as it is.”

“ That man ? You don’t mean Betsford Mudge ? Nay, now you have picked out a fine specimen ! Seriously, Maria, I do not imagine that that person goes to bed sober five times in the course of the twelvemonth ; and it is whispered by those who know him best, that in these insane moments he has even been guilty of raising his hand against that poor little meek wife of his, who looks as if his excesses were killing her by inches.”

Miss Palliser abstained from praising any other of the Colonel’s relations. A heavy weight was stealing over spirits that were seldom very light ; and when they had gained once more the safe locality of the hall, where few but the servants were passing, and they were at liberty to converse with freedom, she stopped, and looking sadly and with something like reproach into her lover’s face, said, “ This is a shocking house to which you have brought me ! ”

He repeated her words in the utmost surprise. “ Good Heavens, my dear girl, what do you mean ? A shocking house, Maria ! ”

“Yes,” she replied. “I call it dreadful! With all the wicked passions and propensities which you have been describing lurking in every corner of it—under the mask, too, of family affection. Think what an amount of hypocrisy, what sinful thoughts, must be working in these human hearts around us. Oh, Colonel, must I stay here? I would rather live an existence the most lonely—a thousand times rather dwell in a desert, than with such people as these. I feel as if the very air I breathe was contaminated by them. Oh, let me, I entreat you—let me go somewhere else!”

The Colonel stared at the fair speaker, and then around the walls of that substantial residence, in ludicrous perplexity; for, influenced by a secret irritability not very usual to him, and of which he was himself quite unconscious, he had gone on indulging in scandalous anecdotes, without once regarding the impression they were calculated to produce on a high-minded and singularly unsophisticated person like Miss Palliser.

Foolish man! Was it not her rigid sense of propriety—her unswerving integrity of principle—her great superiority, in short, to the usual failings of her sex and age, that had won for her his respect and affection? What, then, could have possessed him to run directly counter to all these excellent perceptions, and, by way of initiating her into the frailties of society, exemplify them from the conduct of his nearest friends and connections.

Let this mistake of Colonel Hussey’s serve as a warning to “persons about to marry,” that they be not

unnecessarily communicative before the performance of the ceremony which unites them. When once you are secure that the prize is your own for life, that for the future there can be no receding, no outlet of escape ; but that feelings, hopes, wishes, sympathies, and antipathies, are all merged in the mysterious unity of wedlock—then, and not till then, may you safely unlock the treasure of your confidence, and pour forth freely all the disagreeable information you have it in your power to bestow.

Is it not recognized as one of the great characteristics of married life, that *he* shall possess no secret apart from *her*, nor *she* harbour a thought concealed from *him*? This, therefore, is especially your time for diving into family affairs, and with affectionate emulation “shewing up” your mutual friends and relatives, exposing all their imperfections, anatomizing their best qualities, and recalling every scandalous report concerning them, till the pleasant form of respectability they have hitherto worn vanishes for ever from your enlightened vision. You and your amiable partner, having now become one and indivisible, the gloss of sentiment, or the scruple of delicacy, which threw a graceful charm over the days of courtship, may be lightly brushed away by the first gossiping inclination which seizes you.

But it still wanted some weeks of the happy period when Colonel Hussey’s tongue might prudently be unloosed, and suffered to wag at discretion ; too late he perceived the error he had committed, and set himself to repair it as well as he was able. He began therefore to

praise where he had so recently depreciated ; in the very face of these dangerous revelations, he declared that a more excellent and honourable society than the Divets—*his* cousins the Divets—and in fact their remotest connections, could scarcely be discovered far or near. Did she believe that, unless he had the highest opinion of them, he would consign her to their care ? her, the treasure of his existence ! But no, it was no fault of the Divets, or the race Divetical, nor even of himself, in mentioning family affairs that had disturbed his Maria ; it was solely the exquisite purity of her own sweet nature which was causing her to shrink from the slightest suspicion of evil. To him individually, the Colonel added, such a beautiful trait in her disposition was inestimable ; for it afforded another invincible proof of her having been formed expressly for him, and him alone.

Nevertheless the Colonel mixing, with a little formality peculiar to him, the lecturer with the lover, admonished his Maria, that she must not in her guileless simplicity go forth into a naughty world, picturing it to herself as a virtuous Paradise.

The young lady forced a melancholy smile at this. “*She* fancy it a Paradise, forsooth !”—but she said nothing, and her well-meaning companion went prosing on.

A more intimate acquaintance with life would convince her that the Divets, so far from being unfavourable specimens of humanity, were nothing less than shining examples to society in general. In every large social meeting some member will be found less worthy than others—

some portion of the community who, for their idleness, obstinacy, or recklessness, seem born only to annoy the rest. "Look where we will," said he, "such instances are always presenting themselves, and, as for the family here, you may consider them remarkably free from these blemishes; and in themselves and in their own household circle, believe me, my love, you will find them every thing you can desire—high in their intellectual tastes, and most scrupulous in their moral principles—setting aside, of course, those frailties which are common to all of us, and incidental to humanity in general."

Miss Palliser interrupted him with a warmth unusual to her—"And is it thus you encourage me? am I to content myself with the bad qualities of one portion of society, by being told that all others are worse still? and that, if these people are coarse, vain, or vicious, they are patterns of perfection compared to what I shall meet elsewhere? Oh, Colonel Hussey, what a world am I entering! and how are *we*, surrounded by all that is base, to shape our own course rightly, or keep ourselves from the corruption I see around me, and hear of every where?"

The Colonel grew seriously embarrassed; for, added to the awkward dilemma (morally speaking) in which he had placed himself, he found that he and his high-minded Maria were getting sadly in the way of the servants, a procession of whom, headed by Dawkins the butler (that individual Dawkins, who, being one of the best-dressed and best-looking men she had yet encountered, had been mistaken by Miss Palliser for an

uncle of the Colonel's), came advancing in admirable order to sustain with light supplies the sinking powers of the company, and enable them to survive the hours intervening between the handsome dinner which they had already eaten, and the supper which was to crown the festivities of that glorious commemoration. The Colonel—not aware of their approach, and turning rather suddenly round, so as to face his beloved, and enforce his reasoning with the more persuasive eloquence of eyes—came into actual concussion with one of these large trays, laden with wine and steaming negus, the whole succession of which, including the temper of Mr. Dawkins, were in consequence seriously endangered. The very precision of step and distance observed by the advancing train, and which the Colonel as a military man was bound to approve, served to increase the effect of the concussion, and communicate it like an electric shock from first to last!

As full against Dawkins came the Colonel, against him came John the footman, and against John came Abraham the groom (doing duty for the nonce in doors), and being shoved to and fro at the will of the regular household troops, and the auxiliary corps of waiters. With a tremendous crash down fell half a dozen jelly glasses intrusted to his clumsy hands; and Dawkins, irascible by nature, and fancying the accident worse than it proved on calm investigation, was incautious enough to utter an oath, so loud as to reach the ears of Colonel Hussey's fair mistress.

The unlucky Colonel! Every thing that evening

went against him ; for as the “ D—n it, Abraham, what are you after, sir ? ”—(the butler dared not swear at the real offender, so vented all his wrath upon the stable-boy.) No sooner did Miss Palliser hear this than she turned upon her lover a glance of bitter meaning, and said—“ Even the servants in this house are muttering oaths and curses ! ”

We can scarcely blame the Colonel if at this point his patience almost failed him.

“ Nay, nay, Maria,” he began, “ this is being too particular. Even the very best of men, my dearest girl, may be betrayed unawares into a—or—in short, a ‘ D—n it.’ I don’t mean to defend the custom, of course, certainly not as a habit, but I have known the most correct men and distinguished officers—(No wine, I thank you ;”) for the tray-bearers, by way perhaps of covering their disgrace, persisted in pressing their various refreshments on the couple that had occasioned it. “ Making every allowance,” the Colonel proceeded, “ for the purity of your sentiments, and then—(Punch? no, not any punch ;) and with all my respect (No, I thank you, Dawkins) for the delicacy which characterizes (Not at present John) your admirable conduct ; yet my love you must excuse me for saying that (I never eat jellies, and blancmange is my aversion) if we are to live like other people, and not as monks and hermits (Phoo, phoo, Abraham, off with you, my man !) Come, Maria, let us effect a retreat into the breakfast-room.”

But even as the Colonel spake, his purpose was checked by the approach of another procession, superior in

dignity, though less in number. The Patriarch, still reverently supported by his son and grand-daughter, was crossing the hall on the way to his own apartments, which lay on the ground floor; and the Colonel, who could do no less than come forward to bid the old gentleman "good-night," was saluted by him in a manner singularly inopportune.

"What, still billing and cooing—eh, Colonel? I left the young ones in the drawing-room beginning a merry old game, and here I find you two playing at one still older—ay, older by many a long year; and a game that will outlive Blind-man's-buff and Puss-in-the-corner, or I am much mistaken. But never blush about the matter, my dears; make the best of your time. Such moments as you are enjoying now are the bright spots in the chequered lives of us poor mortals; and believe me, young people, you will dearly love to look back upon them when you shall come to be as old and foolish as I am."

It was said in so kind and even feeling a tone, and the old lawyer looked so benevolently upon the lovers as he thus counselled them, that Colonel Hussey, though conscious how ill such remarks applied to himself and his betrothed mistress just at that particular juncture, suppressed every outward sign of vexation, and made his old friend some equally civil reply.

"Yes, Benjamin," the other proceeded as they moved slowly on together—"I have been giving, as I flatter myself, some excellent advice to the young people—our young cousins there; and, as it agrees pretty well with

their inclinations, I dare say they will not be tardy in following it."

"Only think of our dear grandpapa turning match-maker at his time of life!" said the grandniece with the whining voice.

"He cannot take up a fairer trade, I am sure," was the Colonel's courteous answer, quite forgetting, as we may suppose, all that he had just been telling Miss Palliser touching the old gentleman's doings in that line.

"Why," said the Patriarch, silyly, "according to cousin Sally, you know it is at least as honest as the business I have given up," and he chuckled over the joke with what seemed to Miss Palliser an expression of successful knavery. "But you of all the party are bound to second me, Colonel, as it is your own example I have been upholding for their benefit. I can tell you I have left behind me two or three very promising cases—a couple or two who, to judge by appearances, are likely soon to tread in your honourable footsteps—ha, ha!"

"You are not afraid, then, sir, of the responsibilities attaching to your new profession?"

"Not at all—not in the least, Benjamin. Marriage, it is well known, is a lottery altogether. We do the best we can to secure prizes for our friends, the rest we humbly leave to Providence. If the chances run adverse (such things will happen sometimes), and they draw blanks instead, the fault is none of ours; we have done our best, and they have no worse a fate than many of their neighbours. No, no; I must not be put off from

my new vocation. There are two or three couple I must bring together before I bid you all a last good-night. And in the meanwhile"—and the old man, pausing at the entrance of his own apartment, looked round with a sly and jocund expression which was peculiar to him. "In the meanwhile, my dears, shall I tell you what I mean to do by way of practice—just to get my hand in, you know—eh?"

"Take care, sir!" said Mrs. Barclay; "for I guess, by the sparkle of your eyes, that you are meditating mischief."

"Mischief, Madam Kezia? I defy you to prove it! Where lies the mischief, I should like to know, of helping a lame dog over a stile, when the poor animal has not a leg left to do his own work with? And we can't but see that our poor young friend above stairs is very much in that predicament. And so what say you, Mrs. George—you who are so well versed in the *sweets* of matrimony, eh?" and here was a sort of jocose sneer, that (knowing all she now did) caused Miss Palliser to shudder. "Won't you help me to pick out a good wife for poor Manley Frere? Some good, kind, little lady to comfort him, and share all his troubles, eh?—and also his thousands per annum—ha, ha, ha! A charitable project, my children; and charity begins at home, you know."

This playful proposal of their venerable sire took the fancy of all present, and of none more than Mr. David Divet, his immediate descendant, who applauded the idea even to the point of clapping and crying "bravo;" while Mrs. George, though she first looked round to be sure that

the servants were not within hearing, added, that if any thing *could* reconcile her to interfering in such an important matter, it would be in favour of a case like that of their poor dear friend. "It is so peculiar! Quite a romance, Miss Palliser. I am sure, like all who know him, you will be deeply interested in Mr. Frere."

"I don't know, I am sure," was the cold reply: "I am not easily interested in strangers;" for the truth is, that the mere accident of a Divet advocating the cause of any particular person or thing, was enough at once to prejudice Maria against it.

"Oh, we are all so partial to him!" It was the fair widow who now spoke; but when her grandfather recommended her trying to comfort their guest herself, he was checked by a sentimental sigh, and a request that he would remember her "weeds."

"True, true," he said kindly; "I spoke unadvisedly. Old people have their thoughtless moments as well as the young. Nevertheless," resuming his wily look—"we must see to poor Mr. Manley's interests, and look out a sweetheart for him in the room of the young lady who has given him the slip."

And, smiling his adieux, the old gentleman retired.

Miss Palliser would willingly have followed his example, and gone at once to bed; but to this the Colonel decidedly objected. With a slight appearance of pique which, under the circumstances, was perhaps not unnatural, he reminded her that something was due to a family who were receiving her so hospitably—she must, if possible, make up her mind to return to the company for a

little while ; and for *his* sake, if not for their's, must put some constraint on her inclinations ; and Maria, too wise or too weak to thwart her future commander, passively resigned herself to his will, and suffered him (gently lecturing as they went) to conduct her back to the drawing-room. There, unhappily, the scene had suffered a material change during the short absence of the betrothed couple. Some of the party were professedly “serious,” as it is called, and would have held themselves personally affronted had cards or dancing—under their most decorous and unexciting forms—been introduced as the chief diversion of the night ; so, on the plea of amusing the children, a game at blind-man's-buff was set on foot. But, as it usually happens where old and young mingle together on apparently equal terms, the juvenile rights and privileges soon came to be invaded, under the directorship of their full-grown cousins ; and while the original players were but jostled to and fro, and literally as well as figuratively shoved to the wall, the real business and pleasure of catching and being caught was entirely monopolized by their elders ; amongst whom, we may further remark, that the anathematizers of the decorous quadrille and sober-minded rubber made by far the most prominent figure.

As it was “*only* a family party” the mirth was growing every moment more uproarious, and the romping more exceptionable. Yet Colonel Hussey, by way of upholding the system of toleration he was so anxious to inculcate upon his charming but “*rather* too precise Maria,” tried for a little while to smile at the gambols of

his grown-up friends ; the effort, however, grew evidently spasmodic, when the oldest and ugliest of the Mudges rushed past him like some superannuated bacchante, with her cheeks inflamed and her dress dishevelled—fancying, poor woman, that she was pursued by her blinded husband, who was far from being so closely hoodwinked as to fall into the error she imputed to him, but was evidently in full chase of the prettiest girl in the room ; and when, as a climax to the uproar, three of the party were overthrown on the floor in wild and shrieking disorder, the Colonel could bear it no longer.

Turning to Miss Palliser with a face which reflected all her shame and disgust, he said hastily—"You were right Maria—quite right ! This is no scene for you—you shall retire at once !" and he hurried her back to the hall, where they now encountered only Mrs. Sarah Barclay, plodding leisurely up and down with her hands in her capacious pockets, and cordially joining in the Colonel's disapprobation of the boisterous revels he had just quitted.

"All very well for little boys and girls, Ben ; but what's good for the kitten is not always good for the cat. They wanted to have me amongst them, but I wasn't going to make a merryandrew of myself just to please a pack of people who wouldn't care a halfpenny-piece if I was laid in the churchyard to-morrow, so as they had my little matter of money shared between them. Get my clothes scratched off my back, and be laughed at for an old goose into the bargain. No, I'd see them hanged first ! Lord bless you, Ben, I knew well enough what pranks they'd be after ; and though I am one of the old

chap's nearest of kin, I don't think they'd have got me down to his anniversary, as they call it, if I hadn't wanted to see you and your sweetheart."

Thanking the old lady for her compliment, the Colonel expressed his surprise that Mrs. George Barclay, whose own manners were so correct, should countenance a scene of such utter indecorum.

"Why, to tell you the truth, Colonel, I don't think Kezia likes it much better than we do, though she puts a good face upon the matter. The Divets, you see, have a vast notion of standing well with their relations, and it's an old custom in the family that once a year they should all meet together from far and near, and drink the old man's health on his birthday."

"And an excellent custom, too," the Colonel rejoined; "nobody could find fault with such an assembly if they conducted themselves properly, and were contented with the amusements appropriate to their age—music and dancing for instance, or rational conversation."

Cousin Sally repeated his concluding alternative with a grin of derision.

"Rational conversation, indeed! And are you such a greenhorn, Cousin Ben, as not to know what the upshot of that would be? Tiffing and squabbling—slandering and backbiting—that would be their notion of a snug bit of chat. It's the way with most family parties that I was ever at; and to my mind, Colonel, bad as their blind-man's-buff may be, it's twenty times better than that way of spending the night—rational talk! Lord, Ben, what a ninny you must be!"

Colonel Hussey glanced uneasily at his betrothed, wishing she had taken flight up-stairs before any more of these candid remarks had been promulgated for her benefit ; he himself had already done mischief enough by his revelations, and here was Cousin Sally corroborating them all.

Mrs. Sarah caught the look, but interpreted it only in part.

“There’s that poor thing wanting to go to bed,” said she, “tired out with her journey, I dare say, and nobody here to give her a helping hand, for the house is all turned topsy-turvy. But I’ll soon have up one of those lazy trollopes, see if I don’t—Here, Betty—Patty! what are your names?” and, at the highest pitch of a remarkably loud voice, the old lady shouted up one long passage, roared round the corner of another, and halloed at the head of the back-stairs. “I see what they are after,” she said, winking significantly; “they choose to be called by their surnames, and make-believe to be ladies’ maids; but they are not going to gammon me in that manner, Colonel. I call ’em all Bettys, and Pattys, and Mollys, and if they don’t like it they may lump it—the conceited hussies!

“Why, you numbskull Dawkins, don’t you hear me calling the girls? Go and look for them directly, and tell them they are wanted.”

The butler beheld her with dignified unconsciousness, as if assuming that he could not possibly be the subject of such an attack; but the dauntless Sally insisted on his doing her bidding, observing as he went that she

never missed a chance of taking Dawkins down a peg or two ; “ for of all the conceited apes !—Oh, here comes one of these minxes at last, with a fine lace cap and a flounced apron ! I only wish she belonged to me, that’s all ! Here, Betty, you are to wait upon Miss Palliser, and see that she wants nothing to make her comfortable—do you hear what I say, Mrs. Betty ? And hold your candlestick straight on end, or you’ll be spilling the wax on the stair carpets all the way you go—Eugh !” and Mrs. Sarah ended her admonition by making a face highly indicative of her supreme contempt for the race of modern domestics.

She then bade Miss Palliser a hearty “ good-night,” assuring her that the house was not often such a bear-garden as it appeared at present ; but that some of the company would pack themselves off that very night, and the rest (if it so “ pleased the pigs”) by next day’s noon would be dispersing to their several distant counties.

In his turn the Colonel, at parting, reminded his Maria, in the kindest whisper, that though obliged to return to Woolwich early the following morning, perhaps too early to expect the pleasure of seeing her again before he went—yet two syllables from her pen—the slightest hint, in short that her present quarters proved disagreeable to her, should suffice to bring him back to Etheridge, not again to quit her side until he had placed her in a situation better adapted to her taste and feelings.

The young lady tried to answer cheerfully, and express a proper acknowledgment to both her good friends, but the effort was evidently forced.

Tired with travelling and recent excitement—subdued in spirit—sad and weary throughout, she followed her conductress with steps which lingered only from fatigue, and not from any tender desire to remain in the neighbourhood of either of her well-wishers.

To escape every sound of the coarse merriment prevailing below was her first consideration, and this was soon effected. After surmounting a staircase or two, and deviating amongst a few intricate turnings, for the house was very spacious and irregularly built, and though she had been introduced to her sleeping chamber already, she could scarcely yet have made her way to it without a guide, they finally entered a long gallery into which her room opened, and a door being closed at the entrance of this passage-room, all direct communication with the rest of the mansion was effectually cut off.

CHAPTER VIII.

MOONSHINE.

MARIA breathed more freely. Not a footfall sounded on the matted floor, and the moonlight streamed in, and looked the more cool and grateful from its contrast to what she had left below, the light—the glare—the heat—and half-veiled intemperance.

A few family relics, shoved aside as too antiquated for the sitting-room, were accumulated in this quarter of the house—some stiff, ungainly portraits, which shone to more advantage in this uncertain light than in the brightness of the day—an old table or two, with legs bowed respectably, and china bowls with their uncracked sides put foremost. Those pictures were, after all, but likenesses of some ancestors of the Divets, and it was very probable that the cousins who had gone before, could neither in morals nor manners have boasted themselves superior to those that had succeeded them, or to any of the nine-and-twenty then feasting and rioting on the ground floor. The lady in brown satin hanging against that wainscoat, might have been only an antique edition of her in blue satin below stairs, who figured in the present chronicle of the Divet family as cheating her

husband's creditors to gratify her extravagant propensities, nor a bit better than her in the green, who was regarded as little less than an adultress. And then that very respectable-looking gentleman stricken in years, on whose periwig and ruffles the sweet moon was shining, might he not have been in his day some grasping attorney, the very counterpart of the Patriarch himself? one who, after grinding the faces of the poor, and oppressing the Pelhams of his generation, had gone to his grave full of years and prosperity? The very tables—for were they not made to unfold—had perhaps in their day ministered to many an unholy propensity for gambling, and the punch-bowls have been flawed in some such disorderly merry-making as Miss Palliser had just fled from in disgust; yet charmed with the coolness, the silence, the immobility of the scene, nothing of all this occurred to her—that matted gallery, compared to the rest of the mansion, was a sanctuary in her eyes, and she seemed at once transported into a world formed of materials congenial to her spirit.

Musing on many things, she strolled on towards a window at the further end of the passage-room, but suddenly stopped, for it was occupied already. A gentleman was standing at it, absorbed apparently in contemplation of the scene without; for, though the house was situated in the midst of the town, there was a garden of considerable extent attached to it. Even in the obscurity which enveloped him, through which so little but the most shadowy outline seemed to be perceptible, it happened somehow that Miss Palliser

never for a moment suspected him of having made art or part of the company below—never once dreamed of his being a Divet or a Barclay—much less a Mudge!

She was quickly but quietly retracing her steps, when the damsel in attendance assured her she need not be afraid of disturbing him—"It's only Mr. Frere, ma'm, and he's as deaf, poor gentleman—as deaf as this chair!" giving it a smart rap as she spoke, which startled Miss Palliser, but, true enough, made no sort of impression on the person Betty was describing. "We all screech like any thing when we want to make him hear us, and after all it's only Miss Sally as *can* screech loud enough. How she *do* holla at him, to be sure!" The explanation, however, had no effect in encouraging Miss Palliser; she continued to retreat softly to her chamber-door, yet there she stopped: either there was something in the figure of the stranger, partially visible as it was, or in the idea of his sore affliction, thus coarsely commented on, which fascinated her attention.

He stood there, motionless as a statue, his arm resting against the window-frame, and his head thrown back as if he were gazing into the skies. The voice of the maid, pert, obtrusive, common—like every thing belonging to the Divets—annoyed Miss Palliser; so she took the candle, and, dismissing Mrs. Betty, entered her room, and, locking the door, looked round behind her with that feeling of relief which, under certain circumstances, nothing but solitude, entire and unbroken, can bestow. She was alone! The Divets, Barclays, Mudges—the Colonel himself, good man—all were effectually distanced;

and at her leisure she might revel in the assurance, that, besides the moral discrepancy that must ever separate her from most of the company, there were solid doors and stout bolts intervening. Yes, she was alone, with only the sweet accessories of silence below and the stars above her, and no living thing near but that solitary being, who pursued his quiet meditations outside. She had fancied herself too tired for any thing but bed ; but now, being freed from all constraint, no longer pestered with the presence of those she disliked or mistrusted, her eyes lost their heaviness, and her spirits rose in due proportion.

There are many emotions excusable in their origin, and justified by their existing cause, which may, in our consciousness of the intensity with which they are working, inflict upon us a secret shame. Miss Palliser felt this in her hatred of the Divets. Warranted as her repugnance might be in the person of the old man, it assimilated her too palpably with the very class she was contemning. She had shrunk from the recital, so injudiciously forced upon her, of the malevolent passions which were actuating these people ; but with this canker-worm gnawing into her own heart, this secret abhorrence of those who, receiving her amongst them as an old friend, were shewing her the most substantial kindness, and entertaining her to the best of their ability, in what respect was she so much their superior that she should hold them in such scorn ? Then, supposing she could exonerate herself with regard to the Divets, there was one to whom so much more was owing, who had surely

reason to complain of her conduct. Colonel Hussey, uniformly good as he had been to her, so mindful of her true interests, and attentive to her minutest wish—she knew she had repaid him that night with heavy ingratitude. He had acted from the best motives in bringing her to Etheridge, and how had she requited him? By openly, and in the strongest terms, expressing her scorn and disgust of his relations—in objecting to stay where he had chosen to place her; also, she was subjecting him to present mortification, and perhaps to future embarrassment.

As meet penance for the naughtiness of the night, Miss Palliser resolved to rise early and make the Colonel a pretty apology before he departed next morning; and, satisfied for the present with this intention of atonement, the good man slid away as it were from her thoughts, in company with many another matter of greater or less importance, which an imagination, livelier than she herself suspected, was soon busily conjuring before her.

Things past, present, and to come, floated on in ceaseless succession. Soon the atmosphere of even that cool room seemed to grow oppressive; she would try something cooler still; and, opening her window, leaned out into the night-air, and looked down upon a scene which, like the pictures in the gallery, had the advantages of novelty, and a moon nearly at the full to enhance its real value.

The garden, though it might be considered large as appertaining to a town residence, and even boasted some trees of venerable growth, was overlooked here

and there by the neighbouring buildings, which peered over its high walls ; but the tiled roofs and tall chimneys, with an occasional light burning in some garret window, presented nothing unsightly to the eye : indeed, a homely picture like this may often, through some undefined association, impress the mind of the beholder more deeply than many a prospect of far wider range and grander features.

Shortly, through the pleasant stillness, there came a sound as pleasant, the church clock chiming the quarters, and then the deeper toll betokening the hour of night. Miss Palliser listened, and was sorry when it ceased ; for, though it reminded her of the bell whose strokes she used to count so often as she sat watching in the sick-chamber of her old home, yet this was sweeter and not so solemn—it soothed, and did not make her melancholy. Moreover, it inspired charitable thoughts ; for her's wandered to that poor man at the gallery window—"What would he not give to hear it as plainly as she did?" and then she began to wonder how he felt, and what he was thinking of, as he stood there, so motionless and absorbed. It was a strange affliction when suffered to this excess : she had never dwelt upon this subject before ; but now it took hold upon her fancy, and a hundred things occurred to her in reference to it, which puzzled and interested her. She wanted to know in what degree the character of one suddenly seized with deafness, as she understood this gentleman to have been, would remain true to its original mould—formed as it must have been under such very different

circumstances. So much that had helped to constitute that character must be excluded from him now ; many an old impression must be withheld, and many sources of information ; and that instantaneous communication from the ear to the brain : she tried to imagine what it must be to have this suddenly closed, and that not for merely an hour, or a day, or a week, but for ever—the earthly “ever” at least. The attempt to throw herself into his position gave her a sensation of horror, as if she were being bricked up like the nuns of old : she shuddered, and seemed to hear each passing breeze, and every murmur of the summer night, with peculiar distinctness—as though they mocked her vain endeavour to feel like this desolate man.

Again she strove to analyze, as well as she was able—without knowing more of his previous life and character—the effect his altered circumstances must necessarily have had upon him ; and, though she could not ponder on the individual man, there was much in his affliction which might be generalized. There were subjects, she apprehended, which must present quite a different aspect to a person in his predicament from what they had worn before : his common course of thought would be so changed and re-adjusted, that, living a few years longer, he might seem to have passed through two states of existence, quite distinct from each other. No one consequently could have so good a notion of what the migration of the soul would be ; she wondered if he ever thought of that. There must be quite a fresh set of interests for his second life

—new hopes and inclinations—a new conscience, too. Would it be called so? and would he have at last two lives to answer for? Most men find one enough, and more than enough, for their mortal frailty!

Miss Palliser grew half bewildered as she followed the intricacies of a subject so new to her as the powers and responsibilities of a person in the circumstances of Manley Frere. She would like for a little while, she thought, to experience such a fate as his, that she might know how she would bear it. Whether she should be resigned, or sink into torpidity, content to live on, deprived of life's chiefest enjoyments, or, more earnestly than ever, desire to die? It was no new thing for her to long for death—would it then be a permanent idea? And, should she have the strength to resist that longing, and shun the temptation of rushing into another world, where—whatever else might be her portion—she would trust to escape the horror of that sullen, inexorable silence? Perhaps Mr. Frere was not a man of deep thought or excitable temper, and in that case such struggles between faith and affliction might never have agitated him. But, on the other hand, who could tell whether at that very moment they might not be distracting his inmost soul? It was possible—and the thought was too striking to be lightly dismissed—"Yes, even as she stood there herself, calm and self-reliant, a fellow-creature scarcely ten paces off, might be—what might he not be meditating?" At the next moment Miss Palliser was smiling at the wild speculation in which her reflections about this poor deaf man had

involved her. It was hard upon Mr. Frere to be accusing him of a tendency to suicide, just by way of a climax to her fanciful reverie. And she of all people to be yielding to such freaks of imagination ! She supposed it was the moon that was influencing her weak brain, and developing her peculiar monomania. She would go to bed, and seek wisdom in sleep ; and so she did, and woke in the morning dreaming that Colonel Hussey was seized with deafness so intense, that not even cousin Sally herself could make him hear a single syllable.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GRASP OF THE STATUE.

THAT resolution of making the *amende honorable* to Colonel Hussey which his mistress had formed overnight, was so undeniably prudent and proper, that it would have been hard indeed if things had not conduced to its due execution next morning. Rising betimes, and issuing from her chamber at an early hour—for her lover was to be on the road before eight o'clock—Miss Palliser found the house already pretty well cleared of all evidences of the obnoxious anniversary, old Divet of course invisible, and not one of the company yet afoot to remind her of past grievances. Only Mrs. George Barclay, with her cheerful smile and aspect of not unladylike alacrity, was moving about the breakfast parlour, a smaller room than any the guest had yet seen, which looked upon the garden, and had the morning sun shining pleasantly upon it. Mrs. George was preparing tea for the early traveller; and no one could look her in the face and doubt for a moment that that tea would be worth drinking. For I cannot bring myself to pass over this subject (though confessing it to be quite irrelevant to the story) without observing, that it

is only clever people who make good tea. There are, of course, occasional exceptions to the rule, and I have known more than one fool who succeeded at last in mastering this useful accomplishment; but that only serves to show what may be achieved by the stupidest women by dint of laudable and unremitting perseverance. Mrs. George, I am aware, when complimented on her talent this way, used modestly to reply that she “inherited it from her mother,” but there she was mistaken; her sharp nose and capacious mouth had descended from the maternal line—the more was the pity! But as for poor Cowper’s celebrated beverage, the fact was notorious that Mrs. David Divet had been a silly old woman, the strength of whose tea could never be depended upon after the first cup. Therefore the merit of Mrs. Barclay’s distinguished and unfailing success in this department was all her own; and as it may happen that, in the pages yet to come, we may not always have it in our power to praise that lady so warmly, it would be unfair to miss the present opportunity—her tea was capital!

Colonel Hussey meanwhile strolled up and down before the windows on a broad and well-kept gravel walk, which extended along the back of the house, and which, as it was slightly raised above the garden beyond it, had obtained the rather grandiloquent name of “terrace.” It was here Miss Palliser found him, looking alternately at his watch, and up at her bed-room window. For time was wearing on, and he, sincere lover as he was, had an appointment in London the ensuing afternoon, and must not dally with the precious minutes even to

secure a last farewell from his Maria; and something besides, which albeit, this was not Saturday or any accredited festival, we may presume would not on such an occasion be omitted.

It was a wonderful relief to the Colonel to find his mistress so much more conformable than her behaviour of the previous evening had given him reason to expect. For he, no less annoyed than Miss Palliser herself at the style in which the glorious anniversary had been celebrated, had been awake half the night, cogitating the propriety of removing her from Etheridge, and trying to determine where it would be best to place his betrothed bride during the period that must intervene before he should be quite at liberty to make himself the happiest of men, and her (of course) the most blessed of women. But the spirit of conciliation in which she met him this morning, charmed the good Colonel, not merely because it helped him out of a dilemma, but as it impressed him with the highest opinion of her obedience and amiability. For though there was no unbounded cheerfulness in Miss Palliser's view of the subject, she showed herself unaffectedly resigned to his will, and ready to conform to it without a murmur. And the tone in which she acknowledged herself to have been in the wrong the preceding night, proved her openness to conviction, and her freedom from that false pride which prompts us to palliate what we feel to be inexcusable.

She did it nicely, too—sadly, but prettily; laying her hand on his arm, with a familiarity she did not often display, and looking up at him with eyes which, for a

moment or two, had changed their usual character of calm reserve for a more sweet and seducing expression. "Don't fancy me after all so perverse," she said; "I cannot tell what came over me last night. But every thing was new and odd, and I was tired, and I suppose peevish. To-day I see things differently, and I dare say I shall get on very well here, even when you are gone; and, if I should not be over happy, it can be but of slight importance. I have endured before now many a worse month than I can possibly spend at this house." She ended with a sigh, and, drawing her arm quietly away from his, the soft persuasive smile died off, and became utterly extinguished.

There was some one in the garden, at a little distance from the spot where they were communing while the breakfast was preparing within; and, Colonel Hussey seeing Miss Palliser's eyes attracted that way, said—"That is the Mr. Frere you heard them mentioning last night." Miss Palliser knew it was Mr. Frere; the slight glimpse she had had of him already—that shadowy indication which the moonlight had discovered to her—had somehow been enough to establish the fact, that the man she beheld there in the full morning sun was the very same person. "He wisely kept his distance from us last night," the Colonel proceeded; "and, between ourselves, I am not sorry he did so. But before I go, Maria, I should like to introduce him to you myself—for I think you will be pleased with him, poor man! You will find him an intelligent companion, notwithstanding his disadvantages as an auditor; and to a heart so full of feeling

as yours, my love, that sad calamity of his would be enough of itself to engage your sympathy, and to lead you to show him a little attention."

"Scarcely that," replied she; "I only wish I had more of the natural kindliness you impute to me. But the truth is, I have no softness of heart, I told you so long ago. Mere misfortune (though I trust I would always relieve it if I could) is not enough to awaken my interest in the sufferer. There must be much besides—intrinsic worth—fortitude—intellect—and even (for I own my weakness in that respect) there must be something like good looks.

The Colonel, safe in his consciousness of being a fine-looking, well-made man, smiled indulgently; but his understanding was of that straightforward, solid order, which was not calculated to enter into the intricacies of an argument like this; it might, in some hands, have been susceptible of much lively illustration and playful banter. All he did for it, however, was to throw a spice of the complimentary, into what he thought a very neat little speech, and Miss Palliser knew better than to be disappointed by it. Many, and many, and many a topic had before then been started between them, the thread of which she had pursued, till, finding it rather bewildered than amused her companion, she had quietly dropped, or laid by to be made matter for solitary thinking and investigation. Nevertheless, as he did not humour *her* nonsense, it was hardly to be expected that she should listen to *his*; so she interrupted him rather abruptly before he had quite finished his speech.

"You call him a handsome man, do you not?" said she, still watching Mr. Frere.

"No, I don't," replied the Colonel, "he is not my style of man. Huddlestone of the artillery is much better looking. *He is really* a good-looking fellow. I should like you to see Huddlestone."

"Is he fond of flowers?" Miss Palliser asked.

"Huddlestone?" said the Colonel inquiringly. She turned a vacant and inquiring look upon him. "I beg your pardon," said he; "I was alluding to my friend Huddlestone, while you were thinking of our deaf acquaintance there. Yes, I should think Frere was very partial to them, from the way he is examining that blossom he has just gathered. Understands them scientifically most likely; a thing," the Colonel added, "I have no taste for."

"No," said Miss Palliser, directing her eyes again towards Mr. Frere. "You are not very scientific, I believe."

"I have no time for those pursuits, my love," he returned; "it is all very well for an idle man like Mr. Frere to fritter his time away amongst flowers, and shells, and that kind of trumpery. No, no!" correcting himself as he caught a certain glance from his mistress's eye, "I don't mean of course to depreciate a harmless and elegant recreation. But you must perceive, Maria, that where a man has a settled profession"——

"Oh, true, I forgot your profession!"

"But not my *professions*?" said he, tenderly emphasizing the word in its plural state. "You never forget them, I trust?"

"Of course not," replied Miss Palliser serenely, and withdrawing the hand he had taken. "It would be very odd if I did, you know."

"And speaking of science," continued the Colonel, "though I may not understand the conformation of a particular plant, or be able to classify shells and preserve insects; yet an officer in the artillery, my dear girl, especially supposing him to have attained a certain rank in the service, can hardly be pronounced *un-scientific*."

"Exactly! Yes, I see," replied his friend—intimating, of course, by the words "I see," the eyes of her understanding, which her lover was doing his best to enlighten; but with those material and contemplative orbs that were set visible in her head, she was still regarding the movements of Mr. Frere. Moreover, she was trying to recall what had been said of him overnight—"something—surely, something about an unfortunate attachment?"

"Oh! that's a sad story of poor Frere's," the Colonel observed. "He was engaged to a very charming woman—in fact, on the point of marrying her, when"—

"I say, Ben, my boy, you'll be too late for the train if you don't look a little sharper." The interruption and friendly reminder came from cousin Sally, who had thrown open her chamber window, and was leaning out of it in considerable dishabille. She then went on to make her morning compliments to Miss Palliser. "How do you do, my dear? All the better for a night's rest and a good snooze, eh? I say, Miss P., don't you let your young man there miss the train."

“Oh, no fear of that, ma'm; the Colonel is always punctual!”

“Yes, when a pretty girl isn't in the case; but you may take your 'davy of one thing, Miss What's-your-name, that when people go a sweet-hearting, they are seldom worth much in other respects. There are you two philandering there (for I have seen you at it ever so long), and not a word have you spoken to that poor deaf thing down below. If your heads had not been stuffed with a parcel of nonsense, you'd have taken some notice of him before now, and not left the poor benighted soul straggling about the flower-beds all alone by himself, you know you would.”

The Colonel defended himself as a lover. “It was our hearts that were preoccupied, Mrs. Sarah, and not our heads. But the fact is, we were just talking of Frere and his romantic story. I was telling Maria how ill he had been used.”

“Ha, that paltry wench!” exclaimed the old lady, as she disdainfully poked her fingers through the ribbon loops adorning the morning cap she was about to put on. “I only wish I could come athwart that Miss Thingembob, and I'd give her a bit of my mind; if I wouldn't, never trust Sally Barclay!”—then twisting the cap round upon one hand, while with the other she gave a final touch to the bows, she transferred it to her head without further ceremony, intimating, as she did so, her charitable purpose of going down and having a good chat with Mr. Manley; “for you are all such a mumping set in this house, that nobody can make him hear a syllable but me.”

Miss Palliser soon became more completely mistress of the facts thus vaguely referred to. From the lips of Mrs. George Barclay the story assumed a much more poetical form than it would have worn had cousin Sally been its narrator ; and she spoke of Mr. Frere, his fine character and mental endowments, in a manner to rouse at once those human sympathies which the Colonel's mistress had declared to be so difficult of excitement in her sluggish nature. It was always Mrs. Barclay's aim to invest the connection existing between the Freres and the Divets with an air of as great equality as she possibly could—so the naked and unadorned fact of old Divet's stewardship to that family was delicately slurred over ; as, “ My grandfather having been for many years solicitor and confidential friend of the late Mr. Frere ; and though, our family has long been removed from their neighbourhood, we have continued on the most intimate terms with the Freres ; so that, when it was hinted to us that our poor young friend wished us to receive him here till his departure for the Continent, we had not the heart to refuse his request ; though, of course, every one must feel that, in many respects, the arrangement could not be otherwise than inconvenient to us. Mr. Frere has quite a filial esteem for both my dear parents, and I really think could not bear the idea at present of being with any body but us.” This sounded well ; but Miss Palliser was scarcely yet in sufficient charity with her entertainers to consider this choice of Mr. Frere's as reflecting any credit on his taste or breeding.

Of course, there could be but one opinion as to the conduct of Miss Girdlestone. Mrs. George, though professing an intimate acquaintanceship with that family also, could allege little beyond the young lady's youth in excuse for her perfidy—"she believed her to be scarcely of age, and probably some powerful persuasion had been used to induce her to annul the engagement;" but Miss Palliser would not receive a word of apology. "To desert such a man when he most needed consolation! It was heartless cruelty—the act of a fiend, and not a woman!"

With a good-humoured smile at the Colonel, Mrs. George said: "There, cousin—there's comfort for you at least, in case any trial like poor Manley Frere's should ever befall you. Though you lose your hearing, you will not have to resign your bride."

The Colonel, looking as comfortably assured as it was possible for a lover to do, turned towards his fair friend, "What say you, Maria," he asked, "shall we strike hands on that bargain?"

Miss Palliser coloured intensely, and—for by nature she was a very sincere person—she even hesitated a second or two ere she placed her hand in that of Colonel Hussey's. His touch had not quite the effect upon her that the grasp of the statue has upon Don Juan; and yet the action, simple as it seemed, caused her heart to cease beating for a moment, and then to bound as if it would have leaped from her bosom.

Miss Palliser then remembered her dream, and the voice of cousin Sally from the terrace chimed in aptly enough with her early vision, and completed the impres-

sion of its reality. But the old lady was only addressing Mr. Frere in her highest key: there was a sort of pride, as well as pleasure, in making herself intelligible to him when every one else found the task so difficult. Emphasizing equally every syllable in what was intended to be a cheerful tone of encouragement, she began the attack as he approached to salute her; and though there was nothing remarkable in his reply, for it was only what any man with or without his hearing might have said, yet Miss Palliser, who had listened with some curiosity for the voice of her fellow-lodger, felt satisfied that it corresponded with the idea she had formed of him.

Cousin Sally availed herself of the double advantage of talking to Mr. Frere at the full stretch of her lungs, while by turning her head round the side-post of the glass door, which opened from the breakfast parlour into the garden, she could make, in her ordinary tone, any comment she pleased to the two at the breakfast-table.

“So-you-wouldn’t-come-amongst-us-last-night. We-were-all-very-merry—(and very tipsy some of us; but there’s no occasion to tell him that!)” Then came Mr. Frere’s voice, low yet clear, “No, ma’m, I thought the kindest thing I could do was to keep my distance—I should only have been in your way.” (“Ah, he’s right enough, poor dear soul—he’d have been a sad plague to us, sure enough!”) Then, exalting her tone, “That’s-only-your-modesty—(Oh Lord! he’ll never make that out!)—mod-esty. Do-you-hear-what-I-say, Mis-ter Manley?” “Extremely well, ma’m; you know we generally contrive to hear what is complimentary to us.”

The old lady then shouted a request that he would come in to breakfast, for which, however, he assured her he had at present no appetite. ("No," was the comment thereupon, "I'll be sworn, he hasn't, poor fellow! He is thinking too much still about that nasty hussy to care about his victuals.) You-had-better-come-in-and-have-a-bit-with-the-Colonel; he's-going-to-town: to-London—(He doesn't hear a word of that)—Colonel-Hussey-going-by-the-early-train. (Oh, Lord! I must give it up as a bad job; I can't be hooting myself as hoarse as an old frog for all the Freres in the kingdom, deaf or dumb, or whatever they may happen to be.) Cousin-Benjamin-starting-for-London. (That's done it, by jingo!")

"Colonel Hussey leaving so soon! Oh, then, I must wish him good by!" and Mr. Frere, courteously giving cousin Sally the precedence, entered the parlour.

So well did he preserve the manner of those who enjoy the full possession of their faculties, that had it not been for an occasional glance of inquiry when addressed by some one whose capabilities were not as stentorian as cousin Sally's, or by the unceremonious remarks made upon him in his presence, Miss Palliser would not have been aware that he was labouring under any peculiar disadvantage. He might have passed simply for a person too absent or too wise to attend to all the frivolous things which were uttered in his ears. But the way in which this gentleman was made the subject of open observation, and even of jest, to those about him, inflicted on Maria a painful and embarrassing sensation. It was

a thing she must get accustomed to; but as yet it was hardly possible to believe him ignorant of what was passing, all the while he was looking and speaking so like other people. "Like other people—like those around him?" she checked herself. "No, surely, not like any of the Divet tribe!"

"Poor fellow! how he must envy me!" said the Colonel on Frere's introduction to Miss Palliser. The ceremony was conducted chiefly by dumb shew; but Mr. Frere had previously been informed of the young lady's name, and her position as Colonel Hussey's bride-elect.

"It must indeed be a trial to him," was the remark of Mrs. Barclay. "Such a contrast as he must feel it to his own forsaken state. Poor man!"

"Ah, well," rejoined the Colonel suppressing a smile, lest Mr. Frere might think himself the subject of it; "you know, cousin, there are certain occasions when a fresh wound is said to be the soonest healed."

"Oh fie, Colonel! that is only grandpapa's playfulness. The dear old man will have his joke; but, of course, he is the only one who has glanced at such an idea."

"Stranger things have come to pass, however. Haven't they, cousin Sally?"

Mrs. George agreed that undoubtedly they had; "but," she added, "I assure you, my dear Ben, I think so seriously of the great event called matrimony, that I would not hold up a finger to forward any thing of the kind."

"You are quite right, Kezia!" the Colonel more

gravely remarked ; “and the sentiment is in strict accordance with your excellent sense and sound principle.”

“Fiddle-de-dee !” said cousin Sally, upon which pithy exclamation the two, leaving their philosophy, burst into a hearty laugh ; and when Mrs. George Barclay *did* open that mouth of hers to its full extent, the fact became remarkable, and the joke of undoubted value.

“I say, Miss P.,” continued Mrs. Sarah, “can you talk with your fingers ?”

“No, ma’m ; I don’t know how.”

“Humph ! Don’t you, my dear ?—Phebe does !” and the old lady winked as a spinster “ought not to wink.”

“Be quiet, cousin Sally ; you grow incorrigible !” said Mrs. Barclay ; then, composing her countenance, she asked Mr. Frere what he was going to do with himself, and whether he would ride at his usual hour ? And he answered her so wide of the mark that it was plain he had not distinguished a word she addressed to him ; but the effort at civility seemed to satisfy them both, and Frere, wishing the Colonel a pleasant journey, shortly left the room.

Miss Palliser felt relieved by his departure ; she also had noticed, or believed she had, a peculiar look of Mr. Frere’s when Colonel Hussey presented him to her. And, while the others were conversing, she had caught the same expression as his eyes encountered hers. A vain woman would have fancied it simply a glance of admiration ; but Maria construed it justly as one of sad consideration, in which (for a professed studier of

character) there was much to be read, even on an acquaintance short as was her's with the Divets' deaf guest.

But now the Colonel had finished his breakfast and taken his leave—even what seemed a last farewell of his mistress. So completely indeed, in his methodical way, had all attentions customary on such occasions been accomplished, that nothing remained for her to do but to wait till the pony-chaise, which was to convey him to the station, should be set in motion, when she would wave her lily-hand in a final adieu to him from the top step of the broad and handsome flight which descended from the wide portal of the Etheridge mansion to the pavement of its high street. When, just as he was mounting the carriage, the Colonel found his beloved one by his side. She had followed a sudden impulse to say something which could not be whispered among the Divets, and, tripping lightly down the steps, was detaining him with a gentle grasp.

“What was it? Any thing forgotten?”

“No, no, all was right—it was only to ask one word—one trifling explanation before he went. Who was Phebe? Was it the pretty widow Miss Palliser had seen last night?”

“What, didn't she know the number of Mr. Divet's family yet? Dear me! How remiss he had been!” and Colonel Hussey, removing his foot from the carriage-step, was preparing to enter into the subject at some length, but time pressed; and cousin Sally, associated now with the master of the house, was holding her watch on high,

while both vociferated from the doorway, that he had not a moment to lose.

So he could only hurriedly explain to his fair interrogator, that the pastoral appellation which had struck her as remarkable, belonged to the youngest daughter of the house, at present from home, but summoned to return hither to help in amusing their deaf visiter.

“And,” added the speaker, with another gentle pressure of the hand, and a little twinkle in his usually quiet eye, “I shall look to you, Maria, for letting me know how my fair cousin succeeds.”

The hand was released, there was a flourish of the Colonel's towards the party at the door, and off went the gallant officer.

CHAPTER X.

OPINIONS DIFFER.

COLONEL HUSSEY having left her, Miss Palliser found herself in the position so new and painful to her, of being amongst strangers with whom there was not one she desired to associate. Some few of the relations convoked to that famous celebration had been accommodated with beds; but, before the morning was much advanced, even these had taken their leave. It happened, however, that before the departure of Mr. Andrew Divet and his young wife—the last mementoes of a disagreeable evening—Maria was witness to a scene which, but for the explanation, the notes, and remarks so liberally supplied by the Colonel, would have been to her completely inexplicable.

Their carriage was announced, and the leave-taking going forward, when, in order to escape the necessity of shaking hands with the sullen lady, or her coarse-looking husband, Maria returned to the breakfast-room, where Mrs. Sally sat knitting a remarkably clumsy worsted stocking, and Mr. George Barclay, leaning against the window in his usual moody attitude, replied not a word to the running commentary on various matters which she was

carrying on. There was a light step, and Mrs. Divet in her travelling dress rushed into the room. With a hurried look over her shoulder, to ascertain that she was not followed, she replied to somebody calling her from without, "I'm coming; I'm coming directly;" and then with a face so changed from its usual sullen character, so full of vehement emotion and passionate love, she cried, "George—George!" Mr. Barclay started at her voice, and in a moment they were locked in each other's arms. It was but the indulgence of a very, very few seconds—a few wild kisses were exchanged, one look into each other's eyes, and she tore herself from his embrace, and ran off as quickly as she had entered. He, standing where she had left him, pursued her retreating figure with his eyes, listening to her agitated voice as the words again echoed through the hall—"I am coming, Divet—I am coming directly!" and he was then leaving the room also, when some idea arrested his steps—he turned, and going up to where Mrs. Sarah sat, leaned over her and whispered hoarsely, "Cousin Sally, you won't tell?"

"Lord help you, George, my boy, I'd as lief cut my tongue out!" was the old lady's frank reply, her lip quivering as she spoke. They wrung each other's hands, and then he turned abruptly into the garden, and was soon lost to view.

This short but most significant interlude was ill calculated to reconcile Maria Palliser to her new abode. Her dislike to the family amongst whom her Colonel and her "Kismet" had placed her, returned upon her

with increasing malignity. Her mind, to which the adverse circumstances of her previous life had lent a cast of peculiar melancholy, became now impressed with a sense of falsehood, and almost of crime, in all and each who composed a portion of this family. The junior Divet, with his bustling plausible address, who was so civil to all the world, that he seemed, as he gave orders in his house, to be toadying his very servants—his daughter, his niece, so apt at a moral sentence, or a sentimental reflection—she distrusted them more than ever. But, above all, was her aversion roused by the sight of the old man, the original object of her hatred, as he came forth at noonday to take his accustomed walk on the terrace, and bask in the cheerful sun. Leaning on his staff, and attended by his granddaughter, his great grandchild (Priscilla's little girl), playing and prattling in his path, he looked indeed the very moral of whatever was most venerable and worthy of esteem. Some neighbours called and joined him as he walked—respectable inhabitants of the town—whose obsequious courtesy and tone of deference, as they conversed with the patriarch, shewed how highly he stood in the public estimation. And truly, in his benevolent and not undignified manner, his sensible remarks on the politics of the day, and his occasional clever raillery, there was nothing for even Miss Palliser to condemn as inconsistent with the model he was supposed to represent—that of one who had reached an extraordinary term of years, in the exercise of every virtue of which men and lawyers are held capable. Just to his contem-

poraries—indulgent to the young—in all that goodly mansion, and the fair town in which it flourished, there were probably but two who looked upon the patriarch with any eyes save those of veneration—these independent thinkers were George Barclay and Maria Palliser.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE EYE.

WE have remarked that it was the constant aim of the Divets to have it appear that Mr. Frere's residence with them was no mere matter of business or convenience, but the result of his personal friendship for the whole family ; it was insinuated that they bore with him and his infirmities from a philanthropic sentiment, and that it was chiefly from respect to the memory of his father, and in consideration of a time-honoured connection subsisting between their families, that they so cheerfully overlooked the inconvenience of having him domesticated amongst them. Now the view taken by Frere himself, of his short sojourn (for as such he intended it) at Etheridge, was but little in accordance with these pretentious vapourings. It was thus he spoke of it to his friend Cranston, in reference to the progress he professed to be making towards a more resigned and equable state of mind. " And I attribute much of this desirable change to my removal to a place and part of the country so entirely distinct from old associations. Any place or mode of living which should in the slightest degree have reminded me of my own

home, or the houses I have stayed at in former times, would have done me more harm than good. But this house of the Divets, and their homely burgher-like way of proceeding, has nothing in common with any of my old experiences. It stands in the high street of an unromantic town, and has at the back, which skirts the suburbs, an odd, confined sort of garden—a thing I should once have abominated; but it serves my turn completely now, for it shews not one attribute to stir up a dangerous remembrance—yet is large enough to allow of my strolling propensities when weary of reading and not disposed to go farther; and, with a little management, I can generally contrive to avoid any unnecessary contact with the family.

“The same safe mediocrity renders the people as favourable as the place they inhabit for my hopes of regaining ultimate tranquillity. Here, for the first time, I am able to enjoy the wholesome conviction that I am (politeness apart) an object of as real indifference to them as they can possibly be to me. Nay, I can well imagine (and that without a single pang of wounded pride) that in point of liking I have decidedly the advantage of my friendly host and his kind family; for, with all my efforts to keep myself out of their way, I know I must be troublesome to them at times. In the meanwhile I can give you no idea how great a relief it is to me to know that I am exciting little attention and no interest. A time must come when, used to my inevitable lot, I shall be able to look steadily into the face of an old friend—even yours my Cranston—without shrinking from its

expression of love and sympathy. But that period has not yet arrived, and, conscious of my weak points, I do my utmost to shun the risk of excitement, and hail with pleasure the safe indifference (never unkindly displayed) of these worthy Divets. I really have not a fault to find with my entertainers, except that I cannot dispossess the good souls of a notion that, because I have lost my hearing, I must necessarily have a passion for chess—though, as I believe you know, it is a game I have taken almost an aversion to, ever since as a boy I mastered some of its difficulties. As soon as I found myself able to beat you, I lost my interest in the matter, and it has never since revived. The old man (you ask me for a sketch of the people about me ; and, though I know you do so only to humour and win me back to my old tone, of writing, you shall not ask in vain)—the old man, then, whose extraordinary age would at any rate make him an object of some curiosity, seems to me the only interesting study amongst them.

“Notwithstanding this wonderful longevity, there is less of old age about him than many a man twenty years his junior displays. And here I was disappointed : there is so much of the poetic attaching to antiquity, that when we see it embodied in human shape, not lying rigid and swathed like an Egyptian mummy, but with an immortal spirit still animating and allying it to our human sympathies—that spirit which shall so soon have passed the bound of life—the coldest heart must, we will say, be touched, the dullest fancy set itself to work, at a sight like this. As for me, having never happened to meet in

human form with any thing quite so aged, I was conscious of something very like awe steal over me, when I first found myself in the presence of old Jesse Divet ; but this soon vanished. With all my desire to do honour to old age, and invest it in his person with a touch of sentiment, I could make out of the deep carvings of his countenance neither a Nestor nor a Michael Scott ; the face is simply that of a clear-headed old lawyer who—spite of his ninety years—is still quite as competent to read your character as you are to penetrate his ; so that, instead of the solemn thoughts I had expected to have had thronging upon me at this first interview, what think you was the meditation that chiefly occupied me ? I found myself wondering how (indented so deeply as are those wrinkles of his) he ever contrives to wash his face ; and half the time we were holding our lame discourse together, I was intently marvelling whether the dirt, as well as the wisdom, of years might not still be embedded amongst this ancient tracery of Time's own chiselling. Nevertheless, though a little disappointed in the impression he makes on me, the old fellow is still worth much in the family group, were it but for the sake of the picturesque. When out of doors he wears an odd-looking fur cap, and reminds me so much of Rembrandt's old men, that I found myself yesterday murmuring as he approached, 'Here comes the Burgomaster !' And upon me such impressions must act far more powerfully than upon those who retain their senses entire. To the most imaginative the voice of one speaking as good English as themselves,

would tend greatly to break a spell like this ; but the freest scope is afforded me for any fanciful illusion I may choose to entertain—old Divet may be talking low Dutch or law Latin for aught I can tell to the contrary.

“The eldest daughter, judging by her countenance and the concise and well-turned sentences which flow readily from her pen, when she communicates with me by writing, partakes much of her grandsire’s acuteness, though it was not shown in one material part of her conduct—her marrying a young husband, the *mauvais sujet* of the family. Her widowed cousin, a gentle person who is often at the house, and who has still an air of solemnity rather pleasing to one who would fain hope there is yet something like fidelity left amongst women—in her I should have taken more interest, if she had not unluckily shown me a miniature of him she mourns. I thought it a particular mark of her consideration ; for I flatter myself I am as easily imposed on by a supposed compliment as the sharpest hearer among you all ; but I have since observed that she discloses the treasure to every stranger who falls in her way, and my vanity has proportionably subsided. But the picture, Cranston—such a face ! So flat, so meaningless, so much the colour of the dirty-looking whiskers ; and when I would have encouraged the charitable hope that the artist had belied him, I was told—and she wrote it upon a slate, so there could be no mistake in the matter—that it was ‘*such* a likeness to my dear Josiah !’ I know not, by the by, from what fatality it proceeds

that almost every body here, and every body connected with every body else, is named out of the Old Testament. It is woeful to think how much carelessness, if not positive presumption, is displayed in the earliest religious rite we bestow upon our children. We talk of our unworthiness, and make even a boast of our humility, and forthwith exemplify it by calling the poor, little, puling inheritors of our errors and our shame, after those stupendous mortals who were consecrated as priests and leaders of a chosen race—associated with whose names are the highest and the holiest deeds and facts, towards which we ought to look only with fear and reverence. And if such names were bestowed reverentially, as trusting that they might prove words of power and a shield of defence against the arrows of Apollyon—if the child, as he grew and comprehended, should feel his heart enlarged, and his good intentions strengthened, by the example of some mighty namesake—or if the man was induced to stop in his wild career, and weep and shudder to think how a holy name was suffering degradation through its affinity to himself—then indeed there might be some excuse for the practice ; but is there one in a million who ever dreams that he ought to be a better man because his name is David or Joshua, Mark or John ? No, not one ! He looks back but to the creatures of his own century and his own stamp, who have borne it before him, and have mangled it by childish abbreviations, and abused it as a thing of common use ; he never casts a thought on the Hebrew hero or the Christian saint from whom it was originally derived. For the sake of

all that is venerable, my dear Richard, do your best to discountenance this custom amongst your rural population ; at all events, stand godfather as often as you can, and inflict upon the unconscious innocent at the font nothing more sacred than your own crusading appellation.

“ There is still another of the household here who must not be overlooked, were it only out of a sort of gratitude due to her for forming by far its handsomest portion. This is a young lady shortly to be married to Colonel Hussey, an officer in the artillery, and a relation of the Divets. He is considerably older than his *fiancée* ; but if my skill in physiognomy is still to be trusted, she is capable of a steady attachment—and a happy man is the Lieutenant-Colonel, if indeed I judge her fairly. They tell me she has seen much suffering, the death of friends and troubles of various kinds, which accounts for a certain calm fixed look, speaking more of sorrow that has been, than of joy to come. It is this peculiarity of expression that attracts my notice more than the actual beauty of her countenance ; and you would think it strange (being such as I describe her) that she should ever remind me of Barbara, but it is simply the force of contrast which, as I behold Miss Palliser, brings before me one whom it is my constant effort to drive for ever from my thoughts. I defy you to find two creatures of the same sex, both of indisputable beauty, so utterly opposed in their general expression—the one so bright, so airy in all her movements, the smile and the frown almost equally bewitching, chasing each other over her features, and her colour varying with every word she

heard or uttered. Nay, I have sat—fool that I was!—and seen her when there was unbroken silence, and she, unconscious of being watched, and even then have fancied I could divine much that was passing in her mind from the play of her tell-tale looks. How strangely different is this from Colonel Hussey's betrothed! A settled repose sits upon her well-cut features, which seem as if disdaining to give way to the call of any ordinary impulse. Of course, it is not the repose of inanity, or I should not waste my time in remarking it; but rather a look which seems to imply that she is bearing with the people and pursuits of common life, while her mind is intent on something of a different, and I should think a higher, nature. And yet she wants not observation on what may be passing. I see her eyes, which are singularly fine (quite unlike Barbara's, but beautiful in their way), travel steadily from one to another as conversation is proceeding, with what is evidently an intense power of observation. So unlike this to the rapid glance of my lost one, which took in and estimated character with what seemed an intuitive faculty. The Colonel, too, is one of those calm collected spirits, so they will suit each other well—apparently, at least, he partakes of her grave solidity. Ah, Cranston, how often I am obliged to use that word 'apparently!' Now all to me, especially on new acquaintance, is made up of guess-work: the exterior—the surface—only can be my guide; and, though I may still amuse myself with speculations such as these, I often think how vain and far from the actual truth they may really be. But the analysis of the human

mind was always a delightful study to me, and I cannot give it up, though I may be but stumbling in the dark all the while."

Miss Palliser would have told Mr. Frere, that indeed he *was* groping his way along a pathway full of dazzling lights and false appearances—most grievously deceiving himself in his estimate of the associates amongst whom his strange fate had cast him. Struck especially by Colonel Hussey's parting words, a little attention to what was passing in this united household convinced her that the Divets, in their plausible behaviour to their deaf guest, aimed at some advantage more personal to themselves than the soothing his mental disquietude, or contributing to his corporeal comfort. They might easily have kept their designs from her had they scrupled admitting her into their counsels; for her suddenly conceived interest in Mr. Frere (a sentiment which increased with all she saw or heard of him) would well have accounted to her for any degree of civility they might have chosen to lavish on one so good and afflicted—the Divets would only have risen in her esteem from their warm appreciation of his merits. And pleasanter would it have been to her to be so deceived; for the insight she obtained of their proceedings, opened to her a prospect which sadly accorded with the dark view she was disposed to take of society in general, and her entertainers in particular; but her engagement with their cousin caused them to regard her as already one of themselves; and although there was at first a slight effort made to veil their intentions from her, as well as the neighbourhood at large,

their solicitude to deceive her soon subsided. Maria was cold and retiring, and they thought her indifferent; nor would it have been important to them had the true opinion of their machinations been openly proclaimed: it was only to oblige her lover that she had been admitted amongst them at all; and further than keeping on terms of decent cordiality with the future Mrs. Hussey, they cared not to proceed in the intimacy. She was at full liberty to come or to go—to remain hours together in her own chamber, or to seek their society below—to partake their conversation, or rest profoundly silent. Under all circumstances in which she might choose to dwell amongst them, they showed themselves equally polite, and just as really careless of her and the estimation in which she held them.

CHAPTER XII.

LA SONNAMBULA.

PERHAPS the strangest part of the matter consisted in the behaviour of Miss Palliser herself, who took much less advantage of the liberty thus afforded her than might have been expected ; for surely it was a mode of conduct which would have seemed most reconcilable with her reserved character, and her aversion to the family amongst whom she was dwelling. In writing to her one confidential friend, she herself adverted to this apparent inconsistency of conduct.

“I had looked forward,” she said, “to having so much time to myself, being now freed from the harassing yet uninteresting business which has fallen upon me since my uncle’s death. I quite reckoned on so much leisure not only for writing to you and the Colonel, but for setting my own thoughts in order, and looking steadily into the grave face of the future—for a grave face it is, Lucy, tranquil enough in its present expression, but displaying always something of an awful aspect to one who thinks of marriage as seriously as I do. . After all, perhaps, it is a fortunate arrangement for me that I should not be entirely given up to solitary musing ; the future I can

as little foresee and estimate as I can (now) control it ; and as to thinking of the past, and whether this or that would have been better for me—it is possible there might be more danger than profit in such cogitating : boldly as I combated your friendly warnings, self-examination, if persisted in too long and too minutely, might tend to creating doubts which, in my position, it would be almost a crime to admit. Somebody has said that an inordinate anxiety as to the health of the body commonly leads to the death of the self-tormenting patient ; whilst the same degree of attention concentrated on the movements and affections of the soul, is scarcely less likely to consign its subject to the wards of a mad-house. And so, in order to preserve my senses entire, I will encourage myself in studying the people about me—the Divets or any one else—who may afford me diversion for the moment, and wean me from meditating on myself and my future condition. It is not, however, the Divets alone who entice me from my beloved solitude ; but their behaviour in reference to another person which is attracting my curiosity—a guest of theirs, who stands in no sort of relationship to them. Heaven knows, the antipodes are not further apart than they and Mr. Frere !” Then, having given her friend a sketch of her fellow-lodger, his worth, misfortunes, and position in the family, Miss Palliser continued—“And this gentleman, Lucy, so distinguished by birth and accomplishments, so highly connected, and endowed with an almost princely fortune (without this last advantage I am convinced the game I am looking over would never have been played) ; but

fancy the presumption of the Divets—they are actually hoping to decoy him into a marriage with one of themselves! I wish you knew all the persons engaged in this precious plot, that you might thoroughly comprehend its absurdity. This noble-minded and high-bred man—this perfect gentleman—whom, in spite of his one disadvantage, nobody can behold without admiration and respect—he is to be exalted to the high honour of taking to wife Miss Phebe Divet, the youngest daughter of his father's old steward! If it were not for my intimate conviction of the mortification they are preparing for themselves, I should be more indignant still; but now I feel a sort of malicious amusement as I watch their manœuvres, and think of the disappointment that awaits them—how richly deserved! But oh, Lucy, if I had been told that a time would ever come when I should like any one the better for being deaf, how little credit should I have given to the prophecy! yet there is no doubt but my interest in Mr. Frere is chiefly derived from this circumstance. Had he his hearing he would still no doubt be a charming person; but it would be only in the sense in which any other agreeable man must be acceptable in society. I might welcome his presence amongst us, but the sort of sentiment that now attaches to him would be wholly wanting; for though he might be saying and doing every thing very pleasantly, and with a grace unknown at Etheridge, still he would be gossiping and jesting with the Divets, their topics of conversation would be in common; and, superior as he must ever appear to these people, he would of

necessity be mixed up in some measure with them and their concerns. But this bereavement of his causes him now to live and move so thoroughly apart from every inferior creature; and while he seems to associate intimately with them, his whole being is so distinct from theirs, that no lowering impression can adhere to him, or taint the pure atmosphere which now surrounds him. Often, when I am half-disgusted at the low tone of feeling or expression which prevails throughout the house—a something hardly to be defined, but which creeps like an impure stream under their external frankness and good-humour—the sight of Mr. Frere seems at once to sooth and refresh my spirits, and in the calm of his presence, the peace and purity it diffuses around him, I can tolerate even the company of the Divets. I like, you know, to analyse our governing motives; and it seems to me that the sort of interest I take in this gentleman, is exactly the same kindly humanity which causes men to regard women and children, and all defenceless creatures (*except* the animals they hunt to death), with a tender indulgence—they cherish and even honour them on account of their very helplessness. And thus it is with Mr. Frere. Strong as he is in frame and intellect, and looking all-sufficient to himself, one knows there are so many ways in which he may be obliged to us for our assistance—the weakest and most insignificant of creatures, even I myself, may lay him under some such gentle obligation. Surely there is something touching in this reflection; at all events, without hurting his character, it tends to bring him down a little to my own

standard. If he had been capable of hearing every silly thing I uttered, I might have been afraid of him, and shy of expressing myself in the presence of his commanding mind ; but now, all the while I am most conscious of his superiority, I can approach him on terms of something like equality, and slight as may be the service I am seeking to render him—the writing a sentence or two, or inventing a sign that may better enlighten him—it forms such an intimate, though unavoidable connection between us, as under no other circumstances could possibly have been established.

“I wish Colonel Hussey participated more in my estimation of Mr. Frere ; but, instead of regarding it as a privilege to be domesticated with such a man (*I* see it in no other light), he mentions him in the patronising tone which offends me so much in the Divets. They affect a sort of compassion which strikes me as the height of impertinence. It is always ‘poor Frere!’—or ‘their dear but unfortunate friend’—as if, by means of these pitiful epithets, they could degrade him to a level with themselves. And yet this sickly jargon prevents them not from uttering many a coarse unfeeling remark upon him, even before his very face, he all the while returning their double-faced civilities with such a confiding expression. I cannot tell you how much this affects me, and I wish the Colonel did not identify himself so much with these cousins of his ; it is unworthy of him ! Even their matrimonial views upon this gentleman fail to strike him in all their enormity ; and I can see by the tone of his last letter that he is not pleased with my

strictures on the subject, and has the bad taste (I must call it so) to tell me that such an alliance would be more to the advantage of Mr. Frere than that of the woman he honours with his choice. I shall, therefore, say no more to him on this head, for I have no reliance on my powers of argument or persuasion ; still it grieves me to find him so mistaken. It must arise either from the silly reason that these people, being his relations, are not to be censured even by his future wife, or that he is really incapable of reading character, and in either case his blindness is little to his credit. I suppose this topic is to be added to the list of others, already too long, on which we can never discourse without jarring in our opinions. I confess it would have pleased me that there should have been one subject—if only one—on which we might have spoken together in the assurance of a full and entire sympathy. If such a unity ever subsists between man and woman, it must be singularly delightful. Having never experienced or observed such a reciprocity of sentiment, I used to deny the possibility of its existence, and thought the Colonel and I were but types of all engaged or married people—he, as the masculine mind, the better reasoner and declaimer, giving the tone and turn to the discourse whatever it might touch on ; I, on the weaker side, modifying my real opinions, so that they should not clash with his ; or—if this could not be—taking refuge in a prudent silence. But I begin now to fancy that there may be exceptions—rare, very rare ones—but still occasional exceptions, to a rule which speaks so ill for the happiness of married life. You

must not here mistake my meaning, however, or fancy that, with regard to every trifling question, I would desire a perfect unanimity ; but I would, if it were possible to obtain it, have such thorough reliance on my lover or husband, that, even when he differed from me, I should never be tempted to doubt the purity of his motives or the strength of his capacity. And then, Lucy, the delight—I can even imagine that—the sort of pride, one would feel in yielding one's judgment to his ; in acknowledging the vast superiority of a highly gifted man over a woman of moderate understanding—that man too, that glorious emanation of the divinity, being he who had chosen you with all your imperfections—chosen you to be his own, whose existence you were to share in this world ; and if, indeed, there be a world beyond the grave, even there, along that unknown, vast, and most awful path you would walk hand in hand together.

“Some notion of a union like this might perhaps have been formed had Mr. Frere retained his hearing, and Miss Girdlestone never been tempted to desert him, for she is described as being (except in this one fatal action) a most charming person ; nor, in fact, can one imagine Mr. Frere endowing any inferior creature with the treasure of his love. How one would like to follow out their story to the end, and, reading the hearts of both, discover if she has ever repented her conduct to him ; and whether he yet retains any lingering tenderness towards her who has so wronged him. It is the fashion here to suppose him still suffering and given over to vain regrets—I

imagine because they flatter themselves that in that case he will be more easily ensnared again; for I observe Mrs. George casts a peculiar look at her grandfather—with all his weight of years, her chief and most enterprising confidant—as she makes some hypocritical remark about ‘poor Mr. Frere wanting somebody—some nice, kind, young creature to comfort him.’ Then the old man, with his low jeering laugh, which I never hear without a shudder, answers her, that ‘Perhaps some considerate damsel may be found to submit to this self-sacrifice;’ and the widow who, with all her affected fondness for her grandfather, does not half comprehend his jokes, thinks ‘There would be no such wonderful sacrifice in the matter.’ ‘But the moral danger, my child, what think you of that?’ the old man says, as he puckers his wrinkled face into its most fox-like expression, and eyes his unconscious guest; ‘the soul’s risk, which you know is always the greatest when the body fares best, and sleeps softest. Oh, it’s a wonderful trial, my children—a sharp course of discipline—to come at once into possession of two fine estates and a mansion in London, with servants, and horses, and equipages! why, any young person who should venture on such a perilous undertaking, might even be required to go to Court! Ha, ha! and is not that an alarming thought, my dears?’ and then the horrid old fellow looks from one to the other under his shaggy eyebrows, with an expression I cannot describe; and all the rest laugh heartily and seem wonderfully pleased with the suggestion. ‘And, talking of carriages, that reminds me by the by (it is

Mr. David Divet who speaks now), if this young man does *not* go abroad—if any thing, you know, *should* happen to prevent his paying a visit immediately to foreign parts—any pleasant little inducement for staying at home, ahem !’ and he nods his odious head, though one glance of old Jesse’s is worth all his son’s grimacing. ‘In that case there must be an entirely new equipage ; it shows how necessary a lady is in that establishment. The stud is still excellent, that has always been kept up ; but the large carriage, the family coach, is literally no better than a tub—ay, and an old-fashioned tub, too. If his poor mother had lived, things would have been on a very different footing.’ ‘A touching reflection, David !’ ‘Very touching indeed, my dear ; and yet, do you know, on some accounts I am disposed to think it may be as well that his poor mother did *not* live—the best of mothers are sometimes a little in the way ;’ and at this they all laugh and call him ‘naughty grandpapa,’ and look at me as if they reckoned on my participating in their abominable mirth. And then that charming Mr. Frere looks up from his book or his writing, and, seeing how lively they are, fancies it some cheerful domestic scene, and regards them so benevolently, that, if they were not quite impervious to shame, even the oldest and worst of the lot must blush before him.

“I try sometimes to repeat their very words as far as I can recollect them, that you may become acquainted with these people, and share a little of my feelings towards them. The Colonel’s unfortunate partiality in their favour prevents me, as you perceive, from making

him the recipient of my censure, and an awkward thing it is for me ; for as the Divets necessarily occupy so much of my thoughts, I really have some difficulty in making out my letters for him, he of course expecting me to write frequently and at length. This shews the impossibility of our having more than one correspondent to whom we can open ourselves with perfect unreserve ; and it happens that on this very subject I can quote the authority of the person I have been telling you about. Mr. Frere writes a great deal, for his connections are extensive. Seeing him busy yesterday sealing half a dozen letters, I said—(that is, I wrote on his tablets, of course ; it is only in that way we can converse with any fluency, and I am getting already accustomed to it)—I said to him then, ‘How many friends you must have!’ his reply pleased me so much, for, glancing at what I had written, he gave me one of his expressive smiles and said, ‘Many relations and a great many acquaintance ; many in whom I am interested, and a few who are interested in me ; but only *one* friend!’ And as he spoke he laid his hand on one of the letters before him (it was evidently the longest there), with what I should call an air of fond reverence, and, shewing me the direction on it, I saw it was to a Mr. Cranston, a clergyman in Shropshire, and I remembered hearing that this gentleman was his bosom friend—for in fact the closeness of their correspondence excites the ridicule of this wretched family, who are themselves so incapable of a disinterested or fine feeling. How I wish the Colonel had been this dear and confidential friend ! He

would then have known how to appreciate Mr. Frere, and I should be spared the mortification of feeling myself in some sort leagued with these Divets, and sharing in the disgrace attaching to their base and paltry manœuvres.

“But was not this a charming reply? I have always, as you may remember, maintained that friendship, like love, can have but a single real object; yet I should never have ventured to adduce my own example in support of the opinion; for though internally assured that nobody besides yourself will ever be confidant of mine, I know how easily it might be retorted that I was too frigid and unconciliating to make many friends. Now, no one can say so of this amiable and accomplished man; and I am delighted to think how—though unconsciously—I have been participating his sentiments.”

Miss Palliser was a candid person, and would not knowingly have thrown a false gloss over her motives and actions; we will charitably believe, therefore, that in seeking to mislead her friend she was but repeating the mode of self-deception through which her own usually calm judgment was now effectually hoodwinked. We see how hard she works to make it appear that it is Frere's loss of hearing that renders him so much the subject of her compassionate consideration, and perhaps she was justified in saying that, but for this peculiarity, he would have remained comparatively indifferent to her. Yet there is one short question which, if she had put it to her own heart, asking it in honesty and simple truth, might, we think, have settled the point definitively,

and if sincerely answered must have roused her to the enormity of her danger, and the depth of the precipice towards which she was so gently yet swiftly advancing. The question is this: supposing the subject on whom this ingenious family were practising had been sixty or seventy years of age, and, wholly destitute of any outward grace of person or demeanour, he would still have been adapted to the matrimonial designs of the Divets, they would have been as culpable in pursuing these designs, and he deaf, and in a measure defenceless, would have been in fact equally worthy the commiseration of a high-minded woman; but would Maria have taken the same amount of interest in his fate, that she bestowed so willingly in the case of the actual Manley Frere? Would she have left pondering on her own private affairs to attend to his, and have spent so much of her time in observing and dilating on the proceedings of the Divets? The better to decide the matter, let us for once employ a little machinery, borrow the wand of Harlequin, and, changing cloth of gold into cloth of frieze, see then how the case may stand. Such mental transformations may oftener, than some of us are aware, be carried on with advantage. We look, then, at Manley Frere under the pleasant form in which we desire to present him to the reader: he occupies a seat near one of the drawing-room windows, and his attention being riveted on the book before him, he is at present in a perfect repose. Yet there is that in his appearance that convinces you at a glance of his being a person of no ordinary stamp; perhaps this conviction, so instantly felt, but hard to be

defined, results in great measure from his easy and un-studied air, so unlike the natural awkwardness and acquired conceit which characterises civilized man in general.

Roused from his occupation to attend to somebody who addresses him, his face assumes the wistful look of deafness which we have elsewhere alluded to ; but in him there is nothing debasing in the expression, nor in any way painful to the observer. It is merely that of a strong mind opposing itself against some adverse power ; some material barrier obstructs the action of the eager spirit ; something of brute force is to be overcome before he can master the subject presented to him ; but that subject being perhaps only some question of trivial importance, you do but regret that his time should be wasted, and his intellect taxed, for such an inferior purpose. He loses nothing of dignity or grace, but in that dubious, earnest, inquiring look you seem to be reminded of the two existences of Manley Frere ; that which he has so lately known, where all was light and certainty, and the dim, doubtful life he is henceforward to endure. Touched, as well as interested, you wish he would not lavish such lively and anxious conjecture on what you know is not worth the trouble he takes to understand it ; and as for his divining what is intended by the countenance of the speaker, why it is the quiet widow, who has looked in, as she passes the door, to inquire after her dear grandpapa, and who now accosts him ; and a lifelong course of affectation has years ago deprived her face of all the natural expression which

should have guided him to her meaning. So both being foiled, forth come his tablets or her little slate, when Mrs. George Barclay, ever equal to the business in hand, places herself *en rapport* with him, and (with or without mesmerism, who shall affirm ?) the matter is somehow made clear to his comprehension long before the gentle Priscilla, writing her most legible hand, and minding all her stops, has put down half she has to say. A little bickering we may presume to pass between the cousins ; for Mrs. George has no objection to annoy the widow by the display of her quicker faculties. Then, little dreaming that he is the cause of ill-will between two ladies who seem to regard each other so affectionately, he holds out his arms to the widow's little girl, enticing her to play with him ; or he caresses the dogs, his constant companions, and has even a smile for the antics of the kitten sporting at his feet ; and, interested by the peculiarity which attends him, you sympathize entirely with Miss Palliser, who, quiet and unassuming, at her post of observation, thinks she can read in even his most trifling gesture the depth of Mr. Frere's reflection and sensibility.

So much for cloth of gold ! for we are willing to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of the material, though the fancy of the beholder may chance to overlay it with an embroidery not entirely its own. And now for cloth of frieze, which, though it be dull to look upon, proves often a stout and serviceable stuff, and, did merit alone carry the day, might claim some portion of the silk and seed-pearl which adorns the brighter texture ; let us see

if, in this instance, it stands any chance of being so ornamented by female fancy. Harlequin waves his wand, and a wonderful change comes over the person I have been describing. For old acquaintance sake we will still call him Manley Frere—but, look ! the complexion of that unfortunate gentleman is assuming a dingy hue, which deepens in certain portions of it even to the orange-tawney, while the nose is growing positively red. And his jaws sink in, and his cheeks puff out, and the broad dimensions of that forehead shrink, and as a miserable compensation it rises into the form of a sugar-loaf, and is crowned with baldness and grey hairs. In short, the gentleman is grown old ; he is still uncommonly hard of hearing, quite as unlucky in that respect as the other Mr. Frere ; but this one is old and ugly to boot, has an awkward gait, and sits uncouthly in his chair. Struck with this display of Harlequin's miraculous power, we turn to see what Miss Palliser thinks of the change ; but she is no longer filling either of her accustomed places in the drawing-room. She is sitting in her own chamber, where they tell us she has been all the morning. So we follow her up-stairs, and, opening her door, look quietly in, and find her at her table writing with an untiring though deliberate hand, and a face of calm content. She is finishing a letter to her lover, Colonel Hussey ; and, when observing how well she is engaged, we retreat and try to shut the door without disturbing her ; she calls us back, and inquires, in her placid way, if we can tell her who is in the drawing-room ; “ for I am nearly ready to go down,” she says, “ but would

rather stay till Mr. Frere goes to take his walk. Poor man, he is very good I dare say—very benevolent and worthy, but—he bores me sadly! and I talked myself quite hoarse last night trying to make him hear me.”

The vision seems fantastic; though founded on some acquaintance with human nature and the heart of woman-kind, it is not altogether a baseless fabric or an idle dream; and if, presuming on the hint it affords us of what was passing within that of Miss Palliser, we are too harsh in our judgment of that young lady, we shall surely err on the uncharitable side. We may condole over mortal frailty and its consequences, frown at Maria, and be sorry for the Colonel, but her self-delusion has the excuse of being—in this stage of her history at least—sincere. She believes the strongest emotion which animates her to be her aversion to the Divets, never suspecting that a passion far stronger and infinitely more dangerous than that long-cherished hatred, is beginning to work under the smooth surface of her outward demeanour—a passion which threatens to exercise its power over her with a strength and pertinacity in full proportion to her vain-glorious boasting, and the proud independence with which we have seen her spurn the charge of being subject to the weaknesses of her sex and age. And even for this grievous mistake her previous life and education offered a fair apology.

In the dreary repose of an existence singularly grave and monotonous for one so young—the same impressions, the same thoughts, feelings, and desires, recurring hour by hour, and day by day, with rarely a fresh inci-

dent to stir the dead sea in which she was becalmed ; no wonder was it that her mind seemed to her, as she examined its organization with an almost impertinent curiosity, to partake of the same torpid character, till she was led, in the presumption of her supposed self-knowledge, to argue from the present to the future, and to conclude that, because she could curb her temper and preserve her serenity in the ordinary trials of daily life, she should be equally capable, in a more extended and exciting sphere of action, of suppressing the deeper emotions to which she might then be subjected. It even appears from her correspondence with Miss Ainsworth, that she did not so much value herself on her assumed exemption from these trials of the heart, but rather held the depressing belief that hers, chilled by icy experience and morbid melancholy, had long been rendered callous, and hardened irreparably against any such natural impulses. Divested of this delusion, this unaffected blindness to the abyss down which she was plunging, her fate would have been no more worthy of sympathy or record than that of any heartless flirt, who, engaging herself from motives of worldly convenience, subsequently plays false with some gayer and gaudier idol. But this was no fair description of Colonel Hussey's affianced love. Singularly modest and distrustful of the attractions she really possessed, prone to reflection, and painfully anatomizing her own sensations, we give her implicit belief when she tells her friend that, but for the grievous infirmity which had bowed Manley Frere to the earth, he would have been an ob-

ject of comparative indifference to her. She would have acknowledged his worth, and have admired his accomplishments ; but the very pleasure inspired by his striking merits being so new to her, would in itself have served to startle and put her on her guard.

Now, however, the danger came in such an unwonted shape, and was hidden under a pretence so specious, that, if evil spirits do really walk the earth to tempt and mislead us, it must have been one of the subtlest of them who wove and spread the net for the destruction of this poor Maria. It was the deafness of Manley Frere, and that alone, which forced them so immediately into contact, and entailed such a sudden and unwonted familiarity. A very few days—nay, even a few short interviews—brought on (and that in the most natural manner) a warmth of intimacy which it would have required weeks and months to establish but for this peculiar state of things, which in truth could hardly have been induced at all under other circumstances.

In the case of any other young and handsome man how cautious would she have been, how fearful of provoking the reproach of forwardness ; but here, so far from dreading any censure of the sort, it was held by all who approached him to be a duty, or rather a necessity—a matter of course—to be kind and attentive to the unfortunate Mr. Frere, that innocent victim of a hopeless calamity ! In every letter Colonel Hussey was still asking her, “How she made it out with poor Frere ?” and more than once she received the thanks of the family while exerting herself to be of use to their bereaved

friend. With such open and honourable encouragement to bear out and sanctify her secret inclinations, who shall pronounce her inexcusable for indulging them? Even with all these aids to backsliding, it required an effort for one so shy and diffident to court the notice of a stranger; but the attempt once made, it became each time less difficult, till very soon Miss Palliser was far more at her ease with Manley Frere than with any other member of the household.

Then came that dangerous point in their acquaintanceship, when, finding how quickly he interpreted her meaning—seizing it as if by intuition long ere the sentence was written down—then it was that the pen became subservient to a much quicker and more inspiring agent, and the modest Maria Palliser, who on ordinary occasions shrank so unaffectedly from the gaze of man, now in all innocence courted and encouraged it; and, the better to convey her meaning to Mr. Frere, would stop in her scribbling labours, and form her lips to indicate the sounds he could not hear, and encourage him to scan the expression of her face, while she looked into his eyes to see how far she was successful.

Still was there nothing in all this that could fall under the imputation of ogling; for it was done openly and fairly, as in the common way of business. Something was to be told to one who could not, alas! distinguish the voice of the speaker; and if it was proved that such information could be better conveyed by a look than a word—by a living glance than a scrape of the pen, surely no woman, let her be ever so young and handsome,

could be justly censured for adopting this natural course of communication.

And even supposing a scruple had occurred to check the progress of their intimacy, there were circumstances attaching to each which would soon have reassured them. Frere, though he possessed far too much taste to be insensible to the charms of the lady who was amusing him so intelligently, beheld them as the chartered property of another, and had in his altered condition too humble an opinion of his own claims as a member of society, to suppose that the Colonel's rights were liable to be endangered by them. While, on the other hand, Miss Palliser, in the pensive abstraction of her new acquaintance, read a full assurance that his unfortunate attachment still tyrannized over him.

"The fond yet hopeless lover of Barbara Girdlestone, might safely hold friendly intercourse with Colonel Hussey's affianced bride." Perhaps she made a mistake in thus arguing; but it was an error so plausible that it might well have misled a more experienced reasoner.

And so the intimacy grew and prospered, and, taking all things in extenuation, we may surely be justified in saying, that seldom has weak woman had more excuse for stumbling, than had Maria Palliser when she fell in love with Manley Frere! The fair warbler who, at sundry periods during the operatic season, emerges from her garret window in her little white petticoat, to pass lantern in hand over points of danger which, in her waking state, her blood would have curdled on beholding, is not to be presumed more effectually asleep to the

perils surrounding her than the unfortunate Maria, when she held on her smooth descent amongst the shoals and pitfalls of Etheridge mansion-house; the fact that her delusion sprang rather from mental than physical causes, rendering it only the more desperate case of the two. The Swiss girl drops her lantern in the dark waters that foam and gurgle beneath her feet, yet gets safely to earth without it; but the flickering flame which lights our luckless Prima Donna, is but some will-o'-the-wisp, born of her own bewildered fancy. The one alights on the stage in safety and honour, thence to meet the recompense of her simple virtues, in the congratulations of her friends and the plaudits of a sympathizing public. The other, we fear, will be vainly expected. No voice of fond greeting can she ever expect to hear, no wreath of fame can fall upon her brow! If she should escape into a nameless obscurity, unpursued by the hiss of the audience, it is the mildest fate we can reasonably expect for poor Maria Palliser!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INNER-LIFE AT THE MANOR-HOUSE.

Now, while Miss Palisser enjoyed the passing hours with perhaps too keen a relish, her satisfaction was not participated by the family at large, seeing that the much-desired return of its youngest member was still obstinately deferred all the time Mr. Frere continued to manifest an increasing inclination to depart on his foreign tour. With respect to this first ground of complaint, they could but grumble and write expostulating letters; but as to any dangerous demonstrations on the part of their deaf guest, slight would have been the skill of the Divets, and most unworthy of record, had they encountered much difficulty in circumventing him.

It is true that David had given up business for some years past; yet enough of his old profession still stuck to that respectable man, to enable him, on urgent occasion, to furnish forth such store of technical terms and long-winded ambiguities, as should suffice to mystify Frere whenever he set himself to unravel the legal difficulties which alone (as he imagined) kept him at Etheridge. Had he seen in Divet simply his agent and paid man of business, Manley Frere's natural acuteness would have

led him to examine and detect many of the fallacies which that gentleman put forth; but as it never occurred to him that his father's old steward could have any ulterior motive for detaining him under his hospitable roof, he trusted him implicitly, and after some vain and not very vigorous efforts to get free, Frere would quietly relapse into the state of apathetic indifference, from which, since the great misfortune of his life, he had been unable to rouse himself. "Why be burthened with the dry detail of business, when there was constantly at hand a competent and zealous friend to transact it for him?"

"In fact he only wished," as he told Mr. Cranston, "that Divet was not quite so anxious for his interests, and determined to put his affairs in proper order. He could not allude to his intended journey, or throw out the least hint of leaving his present quarters, but that worthy old fellow would persist in coming down upon him with such a load of papers—such an accumulation of the driest matter—and was so ready with explanation and advice scarcely less hard of comprehension, that though," he said, "I put on my wisest look, and ask a question or two for form's sake and to satisfy him, I cannot boast of profiting much by our consultations. I am not conscious that my loss of hearing has entailed any general want of understanding; on the contrary, I have thought that my opportunities for entire abstraction were rather favourable to the development of a certain portion of my intellect, especially to comprehending whatever requires a close and involved train of calcula-

tion. But it would seem as if this rule did not hold good in matters admitting of practical application, as I certainly find—and feel a little mortified at the discovery—that, at the end of my conferences with Divet, I am often further than ever from such an insight into the state of my affairs as I should be glad to obtain. There is no ascribing the fault to him, whom I know to be a clear-headed and thorough man of business, and perfectly master of the subject in hand; and so I get puzzled and weary, and give up the thing in despair, vexed with myself for being so dull, and sadly reflecting on the further misery that may be awaiting me in an increasing dimness of comprehension. How different are my feelings from those of my friend and instructor, who evidently takes the liveliest interest in much that is most irksome to me, and plunges into the minutiae of business with such unction, that I scarcely have the heart to interrupt him! Is it really, Cranston, worth while, as some people tell you, that you should devote two-thirds of your life to the drudgery of a profession, in order at last to enjoy the satisfaction of turning gentleman and playing the amateur with it, and so making child's play of what was once a stringent duty? I was cogitating this point as Divet bustled into my room yesterday, requesting a few minutes' attention, to the end that certain matters of importance should be finally put in order before my leaving England—'concerning the Yorkshire property especially, and also touching those houses in Pimlico.' This latter subject you must know to be a sort of bugbear to me:

whenever my cup of legal misery is full to the brim, the drop which causes it to overflow is, invariably some reference to a certain disputed point of law relating to those unlucky tenements 'the houses in Pimlico.' Well, my speculations ended in my wondering how long it would take a galley-slave, who had completed his ten or twenty years tugging at the oar, before he should volunteer to row a Thames wherry from Putney Bridge to Twickenham, solely out of a tender remembrance of his bygone labours. Warned by painful experience, I am usually cautious of alluding to my approaching travels; but this morning, having suffered the word 'passport' to escape me, I could see at once that I had committed myself. And now I am in instant dread of a visit from my zealous friend, full of apologies I cannot hear, and instructions I cannot understand. I wish he would depute his daughter to commune with me, for *her* meaning it is seldom difficult to catch—or the Colonel's betrothed, whose thoughtful eyes it is a pleasure (though a sad one) to look into."

Mr. Frere is not mistaken; his host *has* been struck with that gentleman's mention of foreign parts—"Hang the fellow!" he says; "he'll be off like a shot one of these days, if we don't take care to stop him!" "That he will, Davy, my boy," is cousin Sally's rejoinder. "He'll give you the go-by, every one of you, before you can say Jack Robinson."

So Divet shuffles off for some deed or document, no matter what, so that the dry aspect of law adheres to it, and looking in upon the ladies, in his way to Frere's

private room, he holds up the parchments, tied with a formidable proportion of red tape, and whispers with a wink—"I say, girls, do you see these entertaining little articles? I am just going to *enlighten* our deaf friend—that's all!" His daughter replies by a nod of approbation, Mrs. Sally calls him scurrilous names, and Miss Palliser blushes indignantly at hearing herself classed among Mr. Divet's "girls."

Even independently of their brazen unreserve, Maria could have had no doubt as to the nature of the Divets' designs upon their deaf guest; every day some fresh matter was arising, which, trifling in itself, indicated significantly enough the one fixed point towards which their scheming tended. She observed about this time that they were growing conscious of a want of foresight in assigning Frere a sitting-room or study, entirely apart from the household. It had been so arranged at his arrival at Etheridge, from the natural wish and obvious policy of humouring his taste and inclination in every particular; but, as interests more personal to themselves rose up before their prophetic souls, the family began to perceive the disadvantages likely to result from this alienation of his society. Hitherto it had been a matter of indifference to them how or where he passed his hours; but a time was near at hand (so at least they presumed) when such long and frequent separations might prove highly inconvenient, and militate sadly against all their fondest speculations. Mrs. George, indeed, professed to think that little was risked by allowing "Mr. Manley" to have his own way just at present; "in a little while he was likely to find

the party assembled in the drawing-room considerably more attractive than it had been ; and she doubted not," she said, with smiling significance, "that they would then have quite enough of his company." But Divet, who, while he was ready "in general terms" to subscribe to his daughter's superior tact, had a fidgety temperament which often led him to interfere with her arrangements, here reminded her that "habits—settled habits, were awkward things—harder to be broken through than you seem to think, Mrs. Kezia ; and, if our friend is always to be jogging off after every meal—in short, making a mere inn of my house—a mere lodging—a place of common entertainment"—

"No fear, sir ; no fear"—with another confident simper ; "depend upon it, we may safely give him to the end of his tether just now—by and by, things will be differently circumstanced."

"Ah, well ! you women will have every thing your own way—we all know that ; but remember *I* have warned you in time—and I wash my hands of it, that's all ! I wash *my* hands of it, Mrs. George Barclay !" and the excitable Divet, rubbing those extremities together with an air of resolute dissatisfaction, walked off to enlist old Jesse on his side of the argument. It was a step undeniably judicious, the Patriarch's opinion being held in high respect, and much oftener deferred to than his own, in any question of domestic management ; and, on the present occasion, the old man sided implicitly with his son ; though, after his own wily fashion, his words, half bland, half sarcastic, fell like oil on the fussy style of his

more irritable descendant. "True—just so, my good son, David—you speak of *course*, en-t-ir-ely for the benefit—the exclusive benefit, David—of our p-o-o-r afflicted friend; you conceive it to be lowering to his spirits to live so much estranged from society—cheerful society—eh, my son? especially that portion of it from whence man derives his sweetest consolation"—in saying which, old Divet looked at Miss Palliser, as if desirous that she should appreciate the jest, and appropriate her share of the compliment—"yes, David, we see and understand the entire scope of your argument—ha, ha! and we honour you accordingly."

"Of course—of course, sir—every one knows my meaning."

"Yes, simple soul that you are, David! it is easy enough to be fathomed. But the question we have to consider now is, how we are best to persuade our friend to come amongst us, and convince him of the advantages he neglects in shunning a little cheerful circle, from which the ladies are to form, I take it, the most prominent portion. Eh, my children?"

"Ah, there's the difficulty!" observed one, peevishly. "Nobody can get him to play chess."

"Nor draughts either," grumbled another.

"Deuce take it—no!" cried Divet; "and it's all to no purpose that I offer to teach him backgammon, though it can't be the noise of the dice he objects to."

Mrs. Sarah suggested dominoes as a diversion likely to keep Mr. Frere in their society; while George Barclay yawned out the name of Blind Hookey, the bare

mention of which obtained him a severe rating from his wife.

“I declare you are such numbskulls, all of you!” exclaimed cousin Sally. “Lord, if I took the thing to heart as you do, I warrant you I’d soon hit upon something that should drive him out of his hermitage. Why don’t you smoke him in his hive, as they do the bees? Make a pretence of lighting a fire in his room—that chimney’s sure to smoke when it’s first lighted—and, if not, just lay something, ever so little, across the top of it, and you’ll soon see if he won’t be glad to come downstairs.”

“Bravo, old lady! that’s no bad thought of yours. I say, Kezia, leave off quarrelling with George, and hear cousin Sally’s proposal.”

Mrs. Barclay listened to it approvingly, and added an amendment of her own; that, as the servants had better not be made privy to the scheme, her husband, while they were at dinner, should mount through the trapdoor in the roof, and place the necessary obstruction over Frere’s chimney.

“Don’t trouble yourself about that,” said her father significantly. “Druce will see to any little arrangement that requires neatness and despatch.”

This was the man, a union of the valet, secretary, keeper, and spy, with whom Mr. Frere had been provided in place of his faithful old Wilkinson; and a very good servant he was, and a remarkably intelligent man, and was moreover supposed by some people, though the circumstance was never alluded to at Etheridge, to

have some remote connection or relationship with the family. All these characteristics considered, Mr. Divet was perfectly justified in placing such reliance on this useful person.

“Druce may rhyme to Goose,” he would observe sagaciously; “but I will vouch for it there is no other connection between the words. So Druce shall have an eye to the chimney-top, and you may safely leave the result of cousin Sally’s stratagem to him.”

“Whoever manages the matter, I’ll have nothing to do with it,” said George Barclay; “for it’s a dirty operation in more senses than one.”

“Come, none of that, Master Georgey,” cried the originator of the scheme. “I only wish you had nothing worse to answer for, than helping to smoke that poor moping young fellow out of his hole.”

“What, cousin Sally,” he replied, “are you turning upon me like the rest of them? I thought I had something like a friend in *you*.”

“Why George, my boy, you know I give it you all round whenever you deserve it.”

“Your powers of reproof cannot remain long idle, then,” he replied with his usual sneer.

Cousin Sally’s hasty yet ingenious suggestion, though not eventually acted upon, served nevertheless as the forerunner of a more extended and important manœuvre. It was one in which Mr. Frere must be the last to suspect mischief, as it was solely from himself that the idea had first originated. For once, while civilly praising the apartment which had been allotted him, he had

observed "that it only wanted a bay-window to be perfect—a bay-window looking into the garden: if that necessary aperture, in its present form rather of the smallest, could be converted into something of an oriel?"——

Here, then, was a glaring opportunity of administering to the taste and convenience of their deaf guest, at the same time that they dexterously served their own purposes. "The window *was* too small—far too narrow for the dimensions of the room. What if it should be altered immediately to the shape and fashion he had recommended?" and so eager was Mr. Divet to gratify every elegant whim of this dear friend of the family, that he proposed even going to the expense of plate-glass, if necessary, for the humouring of his particular fancy.

"Take care!" murmured old Jesse. "Have a care, my friends, that you do not scare away the bird by disturbing its nest too suddenly,"—but as Kezia and her father conducted the matter, it was accomplished so discreetly, so many apologies made in the best style of each, such kind and reiterated assurances that, in case Mr. Frere objected to occupying another sitting-room, no alteration should be entered upon while he remained in the house! At the same time it was persuasively insinuated—"his suggestion," this "bright thought of *his*," would be such a manifest improvement to that range of the building. "Grandpapa, for one, would never be easy till it was carried out," and then it would be "so useful" to have his opinion as the work proceeded; for they hoped he would

not refuse to look in upon it now and then, to see what the carpenters were doing. A little plan, too—just a little sketch of his own idea in his own hand, if such a request might be made—a thing of that sort would be invaluable ; for Gibbs, though a capital workman, and quite competent to the handicraft part of his business, was no designer—“ They, none of them were,” Mrs. Barclay observed with a frank smile as she penned the little equivoque, her father applauding her with a subdued chuckle. “ The only one amongst them,” she added, “ who had any knowledge of drawing, was unluckily out of the way. They were all ignoramuses with regard to taste, all except that little pet lamb of their’s, who was straying away from the parent-fold.”

“ That’s it ! that’s the thing exactly !” murmured Divet, looking over her shoulder as she wrote. “ Upon my word, Mrs. George, you are a treasure of a woman, though your husband does not seem to think so !”

Thus pressed, Mr. Frere (though much he would have preferred keeping the room he had found so suited to his requirements) could not refuse to turn out. He was secretly annoyed, however, at finding, when the workman had actually commenced operations, and the measure could not be remedied, that he was expected to remove to the common sitting-room ; but being given to understand, with explanations almost as unintelligible to him as David’s law, that they could not, “ just then,” assign him another apartment entirely to himself, he could not make any strenuous objection to the arrangement. At first he meditated retiring much into his sleeping cham-

ber—had even serious thoughts of leaving Etheridge altogether ; but when he saw how considerately they had arranged what was to be held sacred as his portion of the parlour, giving him up the pleasantest window, round which they had drawn a large folding-screen to hide him from vulgar eyes when he chose to be solitary, furnishing the enclosure with tables, ranged on which he found, on returning from his ride the next day, his books and papers laid ready to his hand—in short, every thing remembered that might be imagined indispensable to his comfort. When he saw these preparations for his special benefit accompanied with such marks of genuine good-humour, and such open satisfaction expressed at having brought him amongst them—so far from allowing himself to betray any vexation, he was only oppressed with this fresh instance of good-will on the part of his friendly entertainers.

Excellent Divets ! For some time past Frere had been meditating what handsome presents he should make them in return for the comfort and convenience their house and attentions afforded him. What ornaments Mrs. Barclay would prefer—what piece of plate would be most acceptable to Divet. He now perceived how inadequate must be any such token of his respect and gratitude towards evincing what he really felt—he must ever remain their debtor. And as to the question of removing, it would (as he argued in his deep humility) be hardly more brutal than impolitic to repel their disinterested affection ; for “ where else,” he thought, “ may I look for any thing like it ? so warm, so natural and un-

forced ! By a few old friends who knew me formerly I may still be tolerated ; and the new people with whom I shall have to mix in my progress through life—with them my position will command a decent indulgence. But what is this to the freely-flowing, unbought love of these good old friends of my father's !”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHRIEK OF THE ENGINE.

AND now it is the first morning on which Mr. Frere, expelled from his beloved solitude, has breakfasted with the family ; and, having finished that meal himself, he loiters at the table reading the newspaper, while the others still keep eating, chatting, laughing, or sparring with each other as is their wont ; though he, unconscious of what goes forward, regards them as a sample of pure domestic comfort—the very moral of an honest open-hearted household, in peace with each other, and in charity with all the world !

The door is open, and above the hum of voices, even the sonorous one of cousin Sally, Miss Palliser distinguishes a step which never fails to act upon her nerves. There are sounds apparently common and innocent, which bring with them to certain hearers a creeping sensation over the surface of the skin, rising gradually till it seems to exhaust itself amongst the roots of the hair. The sight of a mouse or a spider will cause it with some people, or the vicinity of an innocent cat ; but the approach of the person one detests particularly,

will act equally well as the exciter of "goose-flesh;" and it was on this principle that the descendant of "the poor Pelhams" recognized, without a doubt, the measured tread and stamp of the Patriarch's staff advancing along the hall. That his seeking his family at that early hour is something unusual, may be gathered from the address of cousin Sally; for, as his shadow darkens the doorway, she salutes him with, "Hollo, old boy, what mischief are you after, that you are up so early in the morning?" In his low hissing voice, that seems in its most ordinary tones to imply something of a double meaning, he says he has a little communication to make—"that is all;" and, as he stations himself behind Mr. Frere's chair (that gentleman being wholly unaware of his approach), the old man holds up a letter, and looks from under his shaggy brows at the assembled family in general, but especially at his eldest granddaughter; for the two acknowledge kindred souls, and the grandsire's shrewdness (as the hereditary gout will often do) has leaped a generation, and descended in all its quickness and fertility of cunning on the second in succession. Accordingly, before the rest have caught the sense of the pantomime, she exclaims delightedly, "From Phebe? I do believe it's from the child, and we may have her here perhaps to-day! Is it really to-day? Oh, you clever grandpapa; this is your doing, and done just in your own arch, eccentric way!"

The Divets were proud of each other. There might be a little squabbling amongst them at times; but it is observable, on the whole, how high a respect the family

talent excites, as it is evinced by the members in their several ways.

Old Jesse's sly nod affirms that "all's right." "Yes," he replied, "while you young people are considering, and consulting, and all to no end, the old toothless fellow of ninety takes the matter in hand, and clinches it in a trice. My little Phebe is a sensible girl, and quite amenable to reason. Besides, my dears, my arguments in this particular case were too sound—much too sound to be refuted, eh?—ha, ha!" and he laughed and looked down as he said this on the placid form of Manley Frere; and again Miss Palliser felt as though water of the coldest were trickling over her.

"Get out with you, you old fox!" cousin Sally exclaims. "Never trust me, if I don't give him a hint of what you are all after, and put him on his guard. I say, Mis-ter Man-ley!" raising her voice to its boatswain's pitch.

"Now, do take care, cousin Sally!" "Now, don't be ridiculous!" was the general cry; for, though looked upon as an ally, the old lady's nature was known to be occasionally dangerously impulsive. "What the devil do you mean, Mrs. Sarah Barclay?" cried David, getting very red, and speaking in suppressed thunder.

"None of your airs, Master Davy, I'll see you hanged before I let that poor, dear, deaf thing be made such a cat's-paw by the whole gang of ye! I-say, Mis-ter Man-ley, any-news-in-the-pa-per? Are-they-go-ing-to-take-off-the-window-tax? (He doesn't hear a syllable.) Any-body-else-been-popping-at-Louis-Philippe? (Ha, ha, how I frightened you all!) What a set of geese you

were to suppose I was going to blab. Why, the poor young man is sure to be made a fool of by some girl or other, and why not Phebe as well as any one else?"

"Hush! recollect the door is open."

"Ha! that's your affair, not mine. But, Lord! to think how hard of hearing he must be. It's my opinion he grows worse and worse."

"So much the better for the future Mrs. Frere," insinuated the Patriarch in his mildest manner, and still keeping his place behind the deaf guest, over whom his aged figure bent like something of evil overshadowing a doomed man.

It was a scene altogether which caused Maria to bite her lip, and draw up her fine person with silent but deep disgust. And yet all her high-toned reserve was not proof against her female curiosity; and, on this announcement of Miss Divet's near approach, she was seized with a strong inclination to learn how far that young lady's qualifications were such as to justify the sanguine hopes of her family. Hitherto she had treated the subject with proud indifference; but this morning she seized the first occasion of being alone with Mrs. Sarah, to question her as to the merits and pretensions of the "pet lamb."

"Pretty?" said the old lady, repeating the query she put to her. "What, Phebe Divet? Lord help you, my dear, what put that into your head? As ordinary a girl as you'd desire to see, though she's a deuced deal better-looking than she was a few years ago. I do think that when Phebe was a little trot of five or six years old she was one of the ugliest children I ever came across.

But," added cousin Sally, arresting a wondering exclamation of Maria's—"she takes with the fellows for all that. Why, there was young What's-his-name there, that was articled to her uncle at Coventry, he never was his own man again, they say, after Phebe went staying there; and little Jefferson, the apothecary's boy—Lord, Miss Maria, you needn't open your eyes so wide at me, I'm talking of the assistant, as they call the young fellow—you don't suppose I meant the chap that carries out the basket with the blisters and boluses! No, no, Miss P., we are a cut above that, we Divets; and Davy's daughter looks a little higher than a doctor's boy, at any rate."

"Well, ma'm, if you will say one thing when you mean another"—

"None of your sauciness, Mrs. Hussey that-is-to-be, or I'll write off to your sodger-officer, and see if he won't take up the cudgels for cousin Sally, and give you a pretty sisserara for being impudent to her. Lord help that poor deaf soul!" looking at Frere, "he is smiling at us, as if he could hear every word we are saying. Ah, poor fellow!"

The unrefined yet genuine good-nature which shone forth in cousin Sally's behaviour towards Manley Frere, were positively endearing her to Miss Palliser, who would hardly now have credited the genteel horror which had seized her originally at the coarse aspect and manners of that untutored old lady. Maria sometimes smiled to reflect that, from amongst the whole of the highly respectable and universally esteemed family at Etheridge House,

the only two members of it with whom she ever assimilated were the most vulgar of the women, and the most dissolute of the men. "What would the Colonel say to this strange predilection of his fastidious Maria? and Mr. Frere—what would *he* think of it?"—Gentle, yet melancholy, was the smile which was wont to light up Miss Palliser's face whenever she mentally repeated the name of her deaf friend. Yet, if she deceived herself with regard to her own feelings, there was no delusion as to the nature of his. Even that morning, when, for the first time during their acquaintance, Frere asked her to walk with him, she, though only too willing to consent, was in no wise flattered by his request; she knew he preferred it only as a convenience, and not because of any particular pleasure her companionship afforded him. Could he have appropriated the services of Kezia instead, *she* would not have been solicited; but Mrs. George must be at home to receive her sister, and Maria was chosen simply as her substitute: Maria was thus far wise in her estimate of their relative positions.

A very destructive fire had broken out the night before in one of the adjacent villages; and Frere, anxious to do something for the relief of the sufferers, and yet aware how greatly his peculiar infirmity must interfere with his personal exertions, sought merely an intelligent companion, possessing a full complement of the sense in which he was deficient, who might make a few inquiries, and direct him as to the fittest objects for his bounty. Most certain is it, that had Manley Frere suspected the exquisite pleasure his request (simple as it

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was) had conferred, he, who was the very soul of honour, and who had suffered so severely from the fickleness of woman, would never have whispered a solicitation of the sort to Colonel Hussey's *fiancée*. And so the two guests of Etheridge House walked out together; and the enthusiastic regard which Maria Palliser was entertaining towards her companion, seemed that day exalted higher still, by the sweet influences of scenery more picturesque than they had yet enjoyed in each other's company. As a fair breeze blew around her, and the fresh grass bent beneath her feet, a soft and deep emotion, the experience of which she had long taken a melancholy pride in disavowing, quickened her heart's pulsation; and tears, such as she had scarcely believed herself capable of shedding, so unwontedly humanizing was the gentle moisture, stole unbidden to her eyes, and filled her with surprise—almost with gratitude.

And still the startling truth lay hidden from her perception; still it was Frere, rather than herself, round whom her thoughts revolved, and whose position seemed to justify whatever was unusual in her own state of mind. She even reasoned regarding this peculiar element of interest pervading the whole of her intercourse with him, and adduced it to Miss Ainsworth, as the impulse of that strong leaning she acknowledged towards the society of one, whose infirmities (though that was a word she never employed in relation to him) precluded much of the freedom of communication.

“I feel how great is the advantage to my own character to be with Mr. Frere,” she said, “for then I

scarcely think of myself. The loss or absorption of our individuality must often constitute the chief blessing of our intercourse with others. I at least am conscious of having pursued the study of myself too long and engrossingly; and, if it were possible so to change my nature, I would gladly shun the examination with all its dangerous results from henceforth—ay, for evermore! for it has brought me nothing but sorrow, and may lead on to despair. Now, whenever Mr. Frere is present, especially when we are alone, and those dreadful Divets do not come between us, casting their shadow upon—no! *not* upon him—never can *he* suffer from such as they, but over my earthly composition and unsettled soul, at these happier intervals my mind is all at work fancying what impression outward circumstances are making on his remaining senses. The poets of old were thought by their reverential admirers to have a faculty verging on the prophetic in their deep musings: a sacred character adhered to them, a divinity was supposed to inspire those utterances which so transcended the common understanding. You will wonder, Lucy, what this has to do with Manley Frere and his deafness, but it has, and fully explains my feelings towards him. I know he cannot be viewing persons and things exactly as other people do, or as they appear to me, and then I get so busy thinking how this must strike, or that thing affect him, that my own identity is (as it were) lost in his—and the selfish principle, that ever-recurring, soul-corroding ‘self,’ gives place for a while to a purely generous and disinterested sentiment.

Surely if by such means I can be made, for ever so short a time, to lose sight of that erring, desponding creature, Maria Palliser, it is enough to make me bless the fate which brought me to Etheridge."

Possessed with feelings so new, and so utterly strange to her that she literally knew not by what name they should be called, Maria wandered on by the side of her too interesting friend, knowing and caring not whither he led her; seeing only that that earth she had hitherto thought so bleak and barren, was indeed most warm and beautiful, and beginning to suspect that men did not wholly err, when they declared that there was something in it worth living for—at least while youth and summer weather lasted.

Within the sphere of this predominating influence, Miss Palliser was sensible to a kindlier impulse, and a union with her species which had till then been unknown to her. Not hard of heart herself, but too desponding in her views to credit the good that might be found in the hearts of others, she gave alms from an abstract principle of duty. She was uneasy as long as the trifle she had to bestow was withheld from those who needed it; but, when once that mite was given, it became her earnest endeavour to dismiss the subject altogether from her thoughts, till the return of the stated quarter-day replenished her slender purse, and bound her to pay her accustomed debt to humanity. None of the common incitements of sympathy or sentiment—of curiosity, ostentation, or that love of meddling in the affairs of others which confers on many the character of good

Christians—led her between whiles into the cottages of the poor; unless she could bring a gift with her, she held them all as too abjectly miserable to be gratified with her visits, and into their hovels she carried the same stern mistrust which clouded her perception of all places and their human inhabitants. Under no aspect had an acquaintanceship with poverty been good for her; for, if its characteristics were low and vicious, she reflected in bitter contempt—not so much on the sinners themselves, as on the mortal nature of which they were the common type: that pitiful thing which fell so easily beneath the weight of adversity and the strife of existence. If it assumed the form of virtue suffering apparently unmerited hardship, her thoughts grew darker still. Then would she question the end and purpose of creation itself; and, if not actually denying the existence of a Creator, would rebel in spirit against the Power which permitted such evil to sadden and deface the earth His will had formed. Such had ever been the course of Maria's benevolence: a charity, or rather a giving of alms, to be followed—as dark night falls upon a gloomy day—by stony scepticism and murmuring misanthropy.

During this visit to the ruined village no such temptation to bad thoughts assailed her; her sensibilities flowed freely and unalloyed, and she might have been cited amongst the most active and gently sympathizing of those who came to pity and relieve. Even to herself the change was apparent, and she rejoiced in the belief that it sprang solely from the influence of the one human being she delighted to honour. “Had *he* not been

here," she said within herself, "I should have been cavilling at every thing—at the houseless wretches themselves—at the motives of the bystanders—and (more than all) at my own hard, suspicious nature; but in *his* presence, and under the power of *his* looks and voice, I can believe in human perfectibility, and for once be trusting and hopeful!"

Then, as having finished for that day their errand of mercy, they retraced their steps homewards, Miss Palliser followed out yet more at length her dangerous mode of reasoning. "Ah!" she thought, "if I could have him always near me, every miserable doubt might be vanquished in time—all that bewilders me most would be made plain and intelligible by his teaching; for if his arguments failed to convince me, the sight of his pure life and bright example would surely strengthen my wandering soul: living with him, a time might come when I should lay this poor bewildered head upon its pillow, at peace with heaven and all mankind, and once more fall asleep in the undoubting faith and innocent confidence of childhood."

It was not long after Maria had arrived at a conclusion so flattering to her deaf companion, that there came a sound which might have been likened to the cry of a soul in torment, or the exultant halloo of the fiend who inflicted the torture; but it was only the whistle of the railway, as the train within sight of them shot forward to the Etheridge station. Never before had its harsh dissonance fallen on the ear of Miss Palliser without jarring that sensitive organ of hers, and probably it had never

resounded through a scene of rural tranquillity more thoroughly at variance with all the new and earth-born associations which cling to its brutal clamour: but now her spirit was not to be sullied by even a reasonable peevishness, the contrast must strike, yet it failed to annoy her, she only looked at Frere and whispered to herself—"If it were the shriek of the mandrake, *his* reason would be safe;" and so Maria finished her walk in peace and great contentment, and reaching Etheridge, made the discovery ere long that that harsh discord—that flourish of fiendish glee—that mandrake's scream—had heralded, amongst other arrivals, the near approach of Miss Phebe Divet.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DIVETS' PET LAMB.

A JOYOUS group was assembled in the drawing-room when the silent couple re-entered the Manor House.

During their walk, Maria had forgotten the very existence of the young traveller; the distant sound of laughter as she crossed the hall, and a certain air of alacrity which seemed to pervade the household, might have reminded her of what had been expected to occur during her absence; still she moved on carelessly, walking as one that enjoyed a pleasant dream, till awakened by the voice of Betty, the housemaid, who met her on the stairs, and accosted her with a smiling countenance—"Please, Miss Palliser, Miss Phebe's come!"

Some curiosity must needs be felt concerning an individual whose presence was so warmly desired, and for so special a purpose; but Maria delicately forbore intruding upon the circle below, till the first flow of family confidences, and the interchange of ideas and anecdotes, strictly Divetical, should have subsided: what length of time was adequate for this, was only to be guessed at—Miss Palliser's actual experience having supplied her with a very confused apprehension of the subject.

Upon any return to the dull place she had called her "home," after occasional absences from it, she had entered it with the chilled feelings of one who knows herself to be cared for only as an inevitable encumbrance ; and she had gone to her accustomed place, and resumed her monotonous duties, without an idea of being able to give or receive pleasure by her reappearance amongst the house-dwellers. She knew, of course, that different ways prevailed in the homes of most other young people ; but, with her own affections systematically discouraged and repelled, the subject of family love allured her but little, and, if unable to throw a doubt over the reality of the sentiment when it was presented to her notice, she seldom failed to scoff at any manifestation of it. The abilities of her uncle, the hoary atheist and republican, who sneered at all things holy or orderly, caused him, though she loved him not, to be the object of Maria's respect ; she had therefore insensibly acquired much of his tone of thought, and even expression, and every year that passed over her young heart, left it more hard and exclusive in its feelings. She loved to boast of her self-reliance, and independence of all human sympathy ; till the monstrous delusion, advanced with hardihood and defended not without considerable ingenuity, became to her as one of her gods. This day, for the first time, Maria seemed to discover the clay feet of the idol she had set up, and doubted if it would stand alone. As she loitered in her lonely chamber, she who had so contemptuously repudiated the claims of relationship, now found herself musing on the charm which must

needs exist in family affection, to diffuse such natural joy throughout an entire household.

The inward complacency which prompted these reflections of Maria's, did not fail her even when she descended to join the family. Indeed she found herself smiling irrepressibly when the new arrival was introduced to her—that ceremony being performed with the triumphant looks which might naturally and justifiably have attended the presentation of some professed beauty.

Much did she marvel how their native presumption could so have misled the Divets as to allow them even in joke, or in the strictest privacy, to couple the name of Phebe Divet with that of Manley Frere. “What a thorough misapprehension of the character, style, taste, and all that constitutes our idea of a high-bred gentleman, must they have fallen into, before they could have ventured to speculate on this ordinary little girl acquiring any influence over him!” Maria beheld in her a mere fac-simile of her elder sister, with only the attribute of youth to soften Kezia's harsher peculiarities. There were again the shrewd black eyes, somewhat high cheek-bones, and rather pointed chin, with much the same neat upright figure, the light firm step, and the head well-carried and thrown slightly back, with an air which, though perhaps not ungraceful, seemed to say, “Behold me at your service; ever ready, and up to any thing which my country, friends, family—my loving kindred, or my own private interests—may require of me!” Really, comparing both ladies, Maria was not sure but she preferred the older edition of the Divetical

peculiarities, with its stronger type and tarnished binding. Not that the little figure of Miss Divet wanted character ; Miss Palliser could see at a glance that it displayed the family conceit to perfection.

The little girl had been staying with an old school-fellow, well married and settled in an aristocratic county ; she had consequently been mixing in society many grades higher than that of Etheridge and its vicinity. And now, the customary civilities having been paid on the entrance of the Colonel's intended, and "Cousin Ben" duly referred to and asked after, Phebe resumed the relation of her adventures in ——shire, chatting away as fast and as freely as before the appearance of Miss Palliser. Perhaps there may on that very account be a little extra boasting about the wonderful success she had met with—"quite unexampled, I assure you, good people!"—amongst the distinguished society of X——. Her father rubbing his hands meanwhile, and calling out, "Well done, Miss Divet ! Mighty fine ! mighty fine, ma'm ! I am really afraid that Etheridge and your poor townfolk will seem sad nonentities after these grand acquaintances of yours !" His eldest daughter chimed in with a quiet but not less evident exultation ; and the Patriarch, bending forward in his chair, with his deep-set eyes fixed on his pet grandchild, murmured, "Vanity, vanity ! all is vanity !" but the warning was belied by the crafty smile that accompanied it.

It might be that there was nothing very reprehensible in all this ; it was but natural that a young person born in one country town, and bred in another, should be

flattered by the favourable notice of those who lived in a higher position than she was accustomed to ; and, if her friends participated in her satisfaction a little too boastingly, why this also, on the score of family partiality, must be held excusable. Maria, in her present temper, could perhaps have forgiven much that militated against her finer tastes, but for the tone which predominated over the family discourse. She had often noticed the mocking vein into which the Divets generally fell as they conversed together ; even though in the highest state of good-humour, their jests were gibes, and their jokes were jeers. And this youngest of the name, who looked as if she had not long left school, possessed the same low faculty in no slight proportion. Though her anecdotes were often amusing, and related with a certain smartness which, in higher circles than the Divets, might pass for wit, they invariably told to the disadvantage of the people whose attentions she was so eager to proclaim. The friends with whom she had been staying so long, fared no better in these reminiscences than her commonest acquaintance ; they were ridiculed in the same sinister spirit, and though many of her stories, shewing up their faults or follies, described unintentionally some proof of their constant attention and kind regard for her, no feeling of remorse caused Phebe's tongue to falter, or her auditors to cry " Hold ! enough ! " And while she depreciated all the world besides, the open and unblushing way in which this young person glorified herself, and repeated the compliments that had been paid her, struck the severe and

ever self-accusing Maria as something monstrous and out of all belief. Describing a county ball to which she had been taken, she reckoned up the partners, some of them men of title, who had swelled her list, applying some opprobrious nickname to each as she named him ; and boasting that, though the town-hall that night had been full of handsome women—two celebrated beauties amongst the number—“yet all the men were vowing they would rather dance with little Phebe Divet, than with the prettiest girl in the room.”

“You should have brought a certificate of that, properly attested,” said George Barclay: he and his sister-in-law detested each other.

“Oh, no !” she retorted quickly, and without abating her sarcastic good-humour. “No, that would have been much too professional. I flatter myself that, amongst the nobility and gentry of my acquaintance at X——, I carefully avoided the remotest allusion which might have reminded them of the red tape in my father’s office.”

“There, I told you how it would be !” said Divet in great glee ; “the hussy is ashamed of her old father already !” Rubbing his hands more briskly than before (it was a favourite gesture with David), he dropped his voice, and looking round him with mock seriousness, demanded the opinion of all present. “Now, do you think—I ask for your unbiassed opinions—do you suppose I have any chance of being civilly received at a certain mansion—a mansion situated somewhere in Yorkshire—eh ? What do you think of it, my good

friends?" looking from one to the other. "It strikes me, by Jove! that I must not shew my nose there uninvited, or I may have a tall gentleman in the family livery kicking me out of doors for a pettifogging attorney."

The jest was highly relished, and David's choking laugh was echoed, though a little *sotto voce*, by the majority of the company, the Patriarch included, who muttered some allusion to Regan and Goneril, and then gave utterance to one of those scraps of sneering morality which, to Miss Palliser's thinking, was worse even than his open approbation of the baseness of his descendants. "Take care—take care, my children!" he chanted out. "Pride comes before a fall; and, with all her lords and members of parliament in ——shire, our good little girl may never be solicited to go farther north."

Here cousin Sally broke in: "You never said a truer word than that, Jesse Divet. Miss Phebe hasn't nabbed that poor deaf fellow yet, for all the airs she gives herself about her lords and commoners. Phoo! my contempt upon such trumpery! Why, except one or two she has mentioned, our good friend here could buy up the whole gang of them, and be never the worse for it. So none of that, Miss Phebe Divet, if you please, marm! and don't set your lard a-frying before you catch your fish."

Their allusions seemed to recall some matter of special interest to Miss Divet's memory; for, interrupting the last energetic speaker, she suddenly exclaimed, "By the by—I knew I had something to tell you! Who do you suppose I travelled twenty miles with?" and with

a rapid glance, and a sort of triumph in her smile, she looked round her, urging her audience to guess.

“Not Sharpe? It wasn’t Dickey Sharpe?” her father inquisitively asked, naming a brother lawyer from the neighbourhood where she had been staying. “Not my friend old Dick—eh, Phebe?”

“No—nor your friend Old Nick either, who I would take in preference for a travelling companion any day in the year!”

At this, the widow, who happened to be present, raising her eyes with pious softness, said she believed she knew who it might “be;” for, said she, “I heard yesterday from Mrs. Mudge, that the Rev. Mr. Butterfield was to leave Hampshire this week, and many of his congregation expected him to-day.”

“Butterfly be hanged!” vociferated cousin Sally. “Do you suppose that the girl would trouble herself, or us either, about a stick of a Methodist parson? Much more likely to be Jem Murrell—he’s for ever on that road, and, to my knowledge, Miss Phebe has always had a sneaking kindness for Jem.”

“It’s much you know about it, you meddling old woman,” was the ready rejoinder. “Priscilla’s is quite as good a guess as your’s, every bit of it. But I must say you are a dull set of folks not to find out the riddle without my telling you the answer—considering what we were just talking of.”

“Why, you don’t mean——?” exclaimed Mrs. George, with a sudden lighting up of her expressive features.

“Ah—Kezia has it!” cried her sister, answering in

the same eager tone. "I *do* mean that when we stopped at ——, the passengers who got in with me were two ladies, and one of those was—Barbara Allen! I beg her pardon, I am sure, a thousand times—Miss Barbara Girdlestone, of Fleetlands Park, in the county of Somerset; whom I beg to present to the notice and consideration of the kind company here present."

"Barbara Girdlestone!" The name was bandied from mouth to mouth in all the various tones of wonder and curiosity. Even Miss Palliser laid aside the cold indifference it pleased her to assume whenever the Divets were conversing about their own particular concerns—even *she* looked up at a name so fraught with interest to her, and held her breath, that she might not lose a single word that was to follow. Then, joining the rest in their eager questioning, she, too, could not forbear asking, "What was Miss Girdlestone like? was she really as handsome as was reported?"

"Quite!" replied Phebe, with decision, as if the inquiry admitted not of a moment's hesitation. "Quite! I never saw so beautiful a creature in all my life. I had known her as a little girl, for she used to come to learn dancing at the school in ——, where I was brought up, and then she was called pretty; but I never thought she would have grown into such a very—very—very—Oh, granny!" turning caressingly to the old man, "if I were but such a beauty as that, wouldn't I set the world in a blaze—wouldn't I, my dear old granny?"

"Be content—be content!" he answered, stroking her fondly on the head. "You have brains—brains, my pet,

which are worth all the roses and lilies in Miss Girdlestone's smooth cheek. Though they are pretty things in their way, those outward adornments—very pretty trappings !”

“ Well, and did you make yourself known to her ?” asked cousin Sally, impatient of this interruption. “ Come, Phebe, do get on with your story. The hussy didn't say any thing about her poor old sweetheart, I suppose ?”

“ Then you suppose wrong, Mrs. Sarah Barclay. Upon my word, I am afraid this family of mine has deteriorated sadly in intellect since I left them to vegetate by themselves !”

“ Well, never mind that now,” said Kezia hastily. “ Let us know what she said about Frere.”

“ I don't tell you that she actually introduced his name ; but, as soon as I began the subject, she was glad enough to pursue it. In fact, I doubt if she would have stood on any ceremony, if she had known at first as much as she did afterwards. But would you believe it ? her aunt and the rest of them have kept her so completely in the dark about him and his proceedings, that she had not an idea where he was. She fancied him abroad—only think how they must have gulled her, to make her believe such fibs !”

“ But you did not undeceive her, of course ?” said Mrs. George, in an accent of grave inquiry. “ You did not tell her that he was here ?” and David, ceasing his exultant manipulations, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, where they kept on a gentle jingling with keys

and halfpence, while he cast a dubious eye upon his eldest daughter, who seemed to view the thoughtless conduct of their "pet lamb" with equal dissatisfaction. "Surely, considering all things," Kezia continued reprovingly, "it was not advisable to tell her the secret which very likely her friends had good reasons for keeping from her."

"Well, perhaps not," said Phebe reluctantly, and hanging her head a little. "But you see I was in a humour just then to consider only my own private pleasure, and *that*"—and Miss Divet's cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled, as she spoke—"that was gratified to the very utmost. Oh! it was so nice to think that, beauty and heiress as she was, I—poor little *I*—had a sort of a kind of a power over her, that, just as it took my fancy, I could turn her white or red, and make her wince," and Phebe hissed out the word just in the tone of her grandfather. "It might not be altogether prudent, I allow; but I did so want to know how she would take the mention of his name. You know, speaking learnedly—for I assure you some of us at X—— were very scientific—it was quite a psychological study."

The Patriarch chuckling sarcastically over Phebe's mistake—for all present perceived it to have been one—kept gently repeating, "Woman-like! a true woman! Female curiosity, attended by the usual measure of female malice."

"Don't slander us, sir!" cried Miss Palliser haughtily. "There's no reason to suppose that your grand-daughter personifies her sex."

The old gentleman merely answered her by a courteous inclination of his venerable head, and a smile, displaying a provoking union of the benevolent and the satirical. This gentlemanly forbearance was his usual way of treating any thing approaching to petulance in the young and fair, and it always irritated Maria particularly. Once or twice before she had attempted, by contradicting him on moral grounds, to annoy the head of the Divets, and so effect a small revenge for the wrongs of the "poor Pelhams," and had always found herself foiled in like manner, with the unpleasant conviction that to any stranger present—perhaps to any one in the town except George Barclay—her conduct must have seemed that of an ill-conditioned young woman, who was seeking with gratuitous impertinence to insult the kindest-hearted and best-tempered old man in the whole world!

Then Phebe, recovering from her temporary abashment, went on with extreme volubility to describe how she achieved what, to a less saucy and determined person, must have appeared the awkward task of introducing the mention of Mr. Frere to the woman who had made herself notorious for jilting him. The little Divet, indeed, denied that there lay any difficulty in the matter. "*I* had nothing to be ashamed of, whatever might be the case with *her*. So, first, after we had recognized each other, we talked very prettily together, as young ladies should talk, about old school-times, and the old French dancing-master, and all that sort of innocent twaddle; and then there were civil inquiries about the health and salubrity of our respective families—not that

the great Miss Girdlestone could condescend to particularize the Divets very accurately. It was highly reasonable that *I* should have all the Girdlestons at my fingers' ends, and inquire after them with becoming veneration; but do you know it was surprising the difficulty she found in remembering my plebeian relations. She thought I had nine brothers at least; but then, to make amends for that mistake, she recollected all about *you*, grandpapa, in a wonderful manner;" and Phebe, subduing her voice, and assuming, with fair success enough, the manner of a well-bred gentlewoman, began mimicking Miss Girdlestone. "‘Oh yes! I recollect you have quite a marvel in your family—somebody told me of it long ago. Do you know, dear Mrs. Prescott, there is one of the most extraordinary instances of longevity in Miss Divet's family—she has a great-grandfather upwards of a hundred, and—how many years is it? ten, I think, they told me—a hundred and ten years old. Only imagine ma'm, what a miracle!’"

"‘Dear, dear!’" cries this Mrs. Prescott.

"It was not the aunt, then?"

"No, no! a frightful old chaperon, who would have looked a hundred and fifty at least, if she had trusted to her natural charms. Such a wig! and such a beautiful set of teeth! ‘Dear me!’ says she, ‘how very unpleasant! It is really very hard to perceive the propriety of these unnatural long lives. I dare say I am very wicked to say so; but it seems such an unnecessary thing to live till one is bald and toothless. *I* call it quite preposterous!’"

Shouts of laughter followed Phebe's personation of

the chaperon, which it must be owned came even easier to her satirical propensities than her first imitation; and the applause was in no wise lessened as, assuming a look of civil simplicity, she repeated her reply to the old lady's declamation on the impropriety of living too long. "Ah, ma'm," says I, "but with such beautiful hair and teeth as you have the advantage of possessing, it's no wonder *you* should be afraid of growing old—oh, it was rich!" said Phebe, clapping her hands. "The old idiot coloured through her rouge, and looked so queer and conscious, and I could see a funny little twinkle in the corner of Miss Girdlestone's eyes; the joke was not lost upon her, though she was vastly too well-bred to laugh outright."

"Capital!" was the general chorus; "but how on earth did you ever manage to bring in Frere?"

"Why, as she chose to make my family (the darling Divets) the theme of her discourse, nothing could be more natural than to present her with a sketch of existing circumstances at Etheridge; and I took occasion presently to say, in the simplest way in the world, that I supposed she was aware that a mutual friend—Mr. Frere, in short—was an inmate of our house. I really *did* think she knew where he was, but I soon discovered my error. She opened her beautiful eyes and caught at my words. 'What, still in England!' she said, 'and at Etheridge? Was I sure that he was there? *Quite* sure?' And then," said Phebe, putting on an aspect of almost childish *naïveté*, "I was so kind! so *very* obliging! I am sure I afforded Miss Girdlestone every information I could possibly give her. But oh!" changing to her

natural manner, "if you could have seen how red she turned, and then so pale—I couldn't help pitying her a little."

"Pity that girl!" cried Mrs. Sarah, always Frere's staunchest ally; "I'd pity her with a horsewhip!"

"Don't be coarse, cousin Sally, if you can help it, and let me come to my story's end. Well, she seemed hardly able to speak for a little while, and then presently she began to ask me all manner of questions—how long he had been here? and when he intended leaving? and then with a great effort, as if she could hardly get the words out, she asked me how he looked? and what kind of health he had?"

"And what did you tell her?"

"The truth of *course*, Mrs. George Barclay!" her sister replied, pursing her mouth very demurely. "But I should tell you of something that heightened the amusement of the scene beyond measure; and that was the bye-play of the ugly old chaperon, who was trying, without Miss Girdlestone's seeing her, to stop my indiscreet tongue; for of course she imagined I was sinning in mere ignorance of the state of the case. What could she imagine, after my compliment to her wig and *et ceteras*, but that I was a model of guileless simplicity? There she was ever so long making all sorts of signs at me, not one of which I pretended to see, though I really think, if it had not been for the pleasure of plaguing the old woman, I should have had more mercy on her friend; and so I kept looking at them both with such an innocent smile, and I said I was sure it would give Miss

Girdlestone, and all who had interest in Mr. Frere, the highest pleasure to know, that he was not only in perfect health, but that his unfortunate loss of hearing had not depressed his spirits by any means so much as had been apprehended."

"Well done !" said Divet ; "that was a good stroke of yours, at all events."

"And so *true* !" his son-in-law remarked with a sneer.

"Ah, never mind if it *was* a bit of a story !" said cousin Sally ; "for, anyhow, it will keep the false jade from crowing over him. And what did she say then ?"

"Why then the chaperon interfered outright. 'She really thought,' " and again Phebe mimicked to the very life the voice and contortions of an old lady with a mouthful of false teeth—" 'She really *did* think that this subject—a most delicate one—a very—a most particularly delicate snbject—and trying—*every* body must perceive—peculiarly trying—under certain circumstances—and with regard to events which—which there was no occasion to touch upon—highly improper—it must be considered highly improper—the introduction by a third person—a mere stranger—in short, evidently improper—a-a-nd—altogether absurd—and in *my* opinion the subject has been canvassed quite long enough—and—had better be changed—Yes'—looking fierce at me, 'better be changed at once.' And then," said Phebe, squeezing her little hands together with triumphant delight, "you should have witnessed, all of you, the glorious—the transcendent set-down she got from Miss Girdlestone. She turned upon the old woman with *such* a look ! it

would have done for an Empress, or the chief wife of the great Mogul. 'Mrs. Prescott,' said she, 'I shall choose my own topics of conversation, pursue them as long as I like, and lay them down when I see fit to do so. To you our meeting with this young'—I saw the word *person* was on the tip of her tongue, but she checked herself just in time—'our meeting with this young lady may seem merely a common coincidence—an unfortunate one, *you* may think it; *I* see in it the hand of an overruling Providence!' And then there followed," said Phebe, "a little sparring between the friends, which, not being acquainted with the nature of all their allusions, even my wide-awake faculties were not quite up to; but it ended in Barbara looking very reproachfully, and saying, that, 'seeing how *cruelly*' (that was the word)—'how *cruelly* she had been misled by those she had trusted most, she would for the future rely upon herself alone.'"

"What the deuce did she mean by that?" grumbled Divet.

His eldest daughter was of opinion, "it could be of no consequence *what* Miss Girdlestone meant. Even supposing her to repent of her conduct to Frere (and there was no reason to presume any such thing), she had gone much too far, and compromised herself too fully, to retract now."

"By the bye," said Divet, "I never mentioned to you that I had a letter a day or two ago from Miss Barbara Allen's papa. Only a matter of business, of course—he wanted some information relative to an old executorship, in which we were concerned together

twenty years ago. He was always as helpless as a child. Lord bless my soul! Do you remember, sir, the trouble we had to make him understand the most trifling matter in dispute—a fine handsome man he was in those days, that looked as if he were equal to any thing, and yet the poorest, faint-hearted creature! Any thing that required firmness and decision knocked him flat at once. Now, when I answered Mr. Girdlestone's letter, *I did not* think it necessary to say a syllable about our deaf friend here. I was not anxious, like Miss Phebe Divet, to stir up awkward recollections—to *my* poor judgment the matter was better avoided."

It was rarely that Miss Palliser expressed any opinion on the family discussions in that house; but now, losing sight of her accustomed forbearance, she said to Phebe, "Miss Girdlestone's conduct has been indefensible, and no one can blame her more strongly than I have done; but, ill as she has acted, I could not have wounded her feelings as you did."

"No, Miss Palliser," rejoined George Barclay hastily, and with bitter emphasis; "but *you* are not a Divet."

His sister-in-law stepping before him, dropped a curtsy down to the very ground as she said, with mock ceremony, "Allow me, Mr. Barclay, in the name of the highly respectable family who have the honour of bearing that designation, to thank you for the compliment intended by your courteous remark;" then, recovering herself, and holding out her dress in minuet fashion, she stepped sideways, now rising to the very tips of her little toes, and then repeating her curtsies

with a saucy air of defiance, and movements not certainly devoid of grace.

It was just at that moment that Mr. Frere made his quiet entrance, and, Phebe's back being towards the door, his presence caused no immediate cessation of the little interlude she was performing so dexterously. He heard not the mocking tones conveyed by her young voice, nor distinguished (for he had no cause to suspect it) the malice lurking in the glance of her eyes. To him it was simply the playful action of a nice little person, half child, half woman—a gay, innocent young creature, who, in her own sportive way, was manifesting her joy at returning home, and rejoining the company of her affectionate relations. And amongst *them* it seemed to Frere that George Barclay's lowering brow was the only dark spot; and he could fancy the sullen voice which was sounding the only false note in the domestic harmony. So judged Manley Frere! and many a man, with ears as acute as his were dull of hearing, have fallen into mistakes as flagrant, and far more inexcusable, regarding the things that were passing before his open eyes.

David Divet, at the sight of Frere, was bustling forward to hand up his youngest daughter, and make a formal introduction of it, when the judicious Kezia, grasping with a powerful hand one of the hinder buttons of her father's coat, bade him be quiet; and, herself advancing alertly upon their guest, the little slate was put into instant requisition, something traced thereupon in a trice, and the tablet held up to him with such a fond look at Phebe, as shewed that though her extreme

youth forbade the necessity of a particular presentation, yet there was something sweet to be said about their "truant child," their "restored treasure," this pet lamb of the Divets, which had been straying away so long from its native pastures.

Miss Palliser watched the scene attentively: Kezia's admirable acting; the quick, bold glance which Miss Divet directed towards Mr. Frere as soon as she became aware of his presence, and the degree of attention he thought it incumbent on him to bestow on an event so interesting to the family.

Finding herself standing rather apart with George Barclay, she ventured to say to him, subduing her voice, "This is an ingenious scheme—but surely they are throwing away time and trouble; it never can answer."

"I am not so certain of that," he replied in the same tone. "The girl herself has the boldness of the very devil, and, his artifice too; and, with the advantage of her sister's abilities in addition to her own, there is no saying what may not fall out; for we are a remarkably clever family, Miss Palliser, as no doubt you must have perceived before now: I for one am proud of belonging to it," he added with his usual sneer.

But Mr. Barclay's opinion made no impression on Maria. She could perceive how natural it was that he should form this judgment; but he, the ruined sensualist, whose sympathy she only sought because he hated his relations, how could such an one as *he* enter into the mind of Manley Frere, or appreciate the circumstances which were liable to affect such a man? Looking at

Frere, as he stood there in the midst of the family group, she laughed within herself at the bare notion of his being endangered by their machinations. But Miss Palliser forgot that she was reasoning with ears as well as eyes wide open—forgot the previous strong prejudice which had tended to sharpen her observation, and perhaps to warp her judgment. It was scarcely possible for *her* to put a candid construction on the motives which actuated old Jesse Divet's descendants; whilst, in their operations on their deaf guest, they were working on a foundation of kindly regard, and a confidence in their simplicity and good intentions, which no shade of mistrust ever crossed.

Then, especially as regarded this youngest of the Divets, Maria was no impartial judge. Women, conscious of good looks themselves, are apt to over-estimate advantages of person in their own sex. In their partiality for a certain form of features or tint of complexion, they are not sufficiently alive to the influence which lies in glance or gesture, or something still more subtle and hard to be defined—that power which men agree in calling “fascination,” because a word derived from affairs of witchcraft and diablerie is required to signify its mysterious mode of action, and can alone excuse or palliate the weakness of such as sink beneath the delusion wherewithal it works; the base trickeries of which all probably but the victims themselves perceive, and value at their true appreciation. We find the name as often applied to that which is fair and good, as to qualities of an opposite character—an instance of the

frequent misuse of language ; for when men look upon a fine face, or a form of goodly proportion, they know wherefore they are pleased, can analyze the charm, and give a reason for their raptures. There is no witchery in this ; the clearer the sight, the easier will it be to discern the really beautiful. It is when that which wears indisputably a mean and common aspect—when plainness of feature is united to coarseness of expression ; when, I say, we find these things exercising uncontrollable sway over the usually quick-eyed and sober-minded, and grace and beauty are beaten fairly out of the field of competition—then it is we see the fitness of the word “fascination,” to signify the seeming inadequacy of the means employed, compared to the power those means contrive to exercise.

If Maria had ever reasoned after this fashion, she forgot to do so in the present case ; for she continued to watch the little Divet’s course of operations on Frere, with what, as regarded Phebe herself, would have been pure sceptical indifference, if her secret feelings towards the object of these attacks had not rendered it impossible for her to be devoid of interest in any—the very slightest—circumstance, the merest trifle, in which *he* was concerned.

At first Phebe’s advances were made with some affectation of reserve ; but so foreign to her nature was any thing partaking of maidenly shyness, that all she could compass was a certain demure and set composure, a remnant of the days of the white frock and coral necklace, when, with shrewdness enough to cover her real audacity, she had been taken into company often beyond

her years, and had never failed earning golden opinions, and the praise of being the very best-behaved child in the room—"so modest and genteel, and answering so distinctly and to the purpose, and always taking the smallest bit of cake on the salver." "By which act of forbearance," Phebe would say when describing her juvenile tactics—"by which means I almost always managed to get an extra slice pressed upon me."

Very soon even this pretended modesty was laid aside, and Phebe, confiding in her girlish looks, began to throw herself in Frere's way, attempting, by various little arts, to attract his notice and engage him in conversation, which was as usual helped forward as much by the eyes as the pen.

Until then the habits and occupations of the deaf guest had been universally respected, and every thing done to convince him that he might reckon on the space encompassed by the Indian screen as a sanctuary sacred from all interlopers, enclosing a solitude to all intents as perfect as that once enjoyed by him in the pleasant apartment from which he had been so politely expelled, and which was now resounding with the strokes of the workmen's hammers. Mrs. Joseph Mudge, indeed, over zealous for Frere's conversion, had once made forcible entry within that charmed enclosure, and had succeeded in presenting him with a sermon of the Rev. Jonas Butterfield ; and the gentle widow, watching her opportunity had shuffled a tract or two amongst the papers which strewed his table, but, under Kezia's watchful guardianship, he had been secured from serious molestation.

The Indian screen, however, with its prim mandarins and grinning dragons, proved no barrier against the incursions of one who brought neither tract nor sermon to justify her audacity. Miss Divet, ere many hours were over, penetrated within that silent circumference, interrupted Frere in the midst of his books and writings, and literally forced him to attend to her.

Even those partial friends of Phebe's, who placed the greatest reliance on her abilities, were startled at the unexampled boldness of such a step. Her sister warned her to "take care," and her fidgety father asserted roundly, that she was going "a devilish deal too far!"

"Don't let her do it, Kezia!" he exclaimed, nervously perambulating that portion of the room which afforded a glimpse into the sacred interior, while he directed a most uneasy glance at what he could discern there. "She doesn't understand his ways as we do. She'll disgust him with her forwardness—Phebe will. She will, indeed, my dear! He is not used to the sort of thing—how should he, you know—how is it possible he should? His mother was the very soul of punctilio; and his aunts—bless my heart—why, they were the terror of the whole county for squeamishness and etiquette!"

"And, pray, what might be the style of his lamented grandmother?" asked Phebe pertly; for she was quite equal to carrying on the conversation, and doing business on both sides of the screen at the same moment. Her father, with a groan, continued to assert that the "game was up;" and it is certain that Miss Divet's reception within the "precincts" did partly justify her father's

predictions. There was a slight but perceptible elevation of Mr. Frere's eyebrows as she came upon him thus unawares, which served to mark his civil surprise, and was enough, while it drew forth muttered oaths from David, to cause his eldest daughter to bite her lip.

Phebe also saw the unfavourable symptoms, for she was a clever physiognomist ; but applying the hackneyed quotation, that "the woman who deliberates is lost" to her own uses, she kept her ground in spite of them, and won the day. Had she been capable of blushing when she found herself considered as an intruder, it would have shewn that she wanted nerve for the prosecution of her enterprise, or if—as an ordinary manœuvrer might have done—she had attacked Frere with the common artillery of soft words and sidelong glances, he would have divined her purpose, and have foiled it with ease ; but when she assailed him with an unblushing cheek, and a style so free and unabashed—her resolute step never faltering, nor her eye for a moment quailing beneath his—what could he read in these signs but the confidence of a simple character, which, knowing no guile, suspected not the possibility of misinterpretation ? The heart of this little girl, like those appertaining to the rest of her kindred, trembled no doubt with the kindest, the most benevolent pulsations, and she was but following its innocent dictates. Yes, here was a fresh sample of the Divets, inheriting their sterling worth, their warm dispositions and natural address, with the additional advantage of being young and lively. And then, as was usual with his own generous nature,

he reproved himself for the slight disturbance which had seized him at Phebe's unexpected approach. "Why should he sit there in exclusive dignity, and stare superciliously at beholding a nice little girl when he raised his head from his book, instead of an ugly old mandarin sipping tea in a summer-house?" Certainly just then he would have preferred his own occupation; but, to make amends for any unintentional rudeness he might have evinced, Frere laid down the volume he was reading, and met the little Divet's advances with appropriate politeness.

It followed as a natural consequence—for efforts at virtue are popularly supposed to bring their own reward and consolation—it came to pass then, that very shortly there was neither constraint nor difficulty in the matter; for Phebe was to the full as clever as the elder sister, whom Frere liked so well: quite as ready with her intellect, and as apt with her pen; and a little encouragement on his part, a very short colloquy, set the young lady as much at her ease in reality, as she had been in appearance. With a laugh of derision at her fearful relations on the outside of the screen, she forthwith fetched a low stool, which she placed at his feet, and, kneeling on it, continued conversing with him through the medium of Kezia's little slate, which she assured him was worth a hundred of his ivory tablets.

Well did Phebe Divet understand the game she was undertaking to play when she commenced it with a dash of contradiction! Here was at once a subject for light discussion and playful skirmish, very opposite to any

thing Mr. Frere had entered into for many and many a day; he defending his elegant little book with its studs and fopperies of fine workmanship, she insisting on the merits of her rougher, but, as she would have it, far more serviceable auxiliary. In that house Frere was used only to the soothing system—the most obsequious regard to all his wants and wishes, and a ready concurrence in whatever opinion he might choose to advance.

Even when conversing with Miss Palliser, the most intellectual of the Etheridge household, he had missed that habit of free and bold discussion, the easy play of familiar dialogue, which had formed one of the greatest pleasures in that existence which had now passed away from him; for Maria's feelings towards her deaf friend had grown into a sort of reverence, subversive of all equality of intercourse. A timidity to which she had never been sensible when conversing with any other man, unless perhaps with her uncle, here overshadowed her intellect, and awed her into diffident submission. She would have held it a species of impertinence to question the truth or propriety of any sentiment of Manley Frere's; or, if she did attempt any trifling argument, any thing beyond the rapt attention and earnest looks with which she listened to his slightest word, it was only that she might tempt him to say more. She would note down some question, or remark on what he had spoken, tracing her characters not with the free and rather masculine hand which distinguished her ordinary writing; for, while conscious that he was watching the movements of her pencil, it would wander along the note-

book with feeble uncertainty, and the scroll might have been easily construed for what, in truth, it was—the effort of one who mistrusted her own powers of thought and expression in the presence of the man she esteemed as belonging to a higher order of being. And often, when he was willing to continue their discourse, she would shrink from what she so greatly coveted, fearful of obtruding her bashful attentions upon him, thinking “he *must* be tired of her—for what was *she* that she should hope to amuse or interest Mr. Frere?” Such true humility there will sometimes be in the depths of a loving heart! Alas for Colonel Hussey! Miss Palliser was never afraid of talking to him.

Now, in his new acquaintance, Frere was untroubled with any of that reverential regard which might smooth down contradiction till it should become a thing of nought. Phebe held the deaf guest in no higher consideration (apart from her peculiar views on his person and property) than any of the male specimens of Etheridge society; nay, in her heart she valued the young assistant, improperly specified by cousin Sally as “the doctor’s boy,” with his sandy whiskers, his forward compliments, and comic songs, far above Manley Frere, and those higher qualities of mind or person which had proved so dangerous to Maria Palliser. Still, to the credit of Miss Divet’s consistency, let us observe that, much as she might prefer the gay young medicine man, she never for a moment contemplated sacrificing her prospects of aggrandizement to any paltry romance in which he could have enacted the hero. In her scientific attack on Frere—for we hope

to evince to an admiring audience that hers was no series of inconsiderate manœuvres, but a plan of operations devised in "best wisdom," and carried out with equal skill and audacity—in this systematic attack, Phebe followed the instincts of a mind essentially ambitious, and which (the idea having been once suggested to her) could be contented with nothing less than becoming mistress of Old Court.

And over and above this great point to be attained, there were inferior but stirring incentives to the undertaking. She was proud of the reputation for cleverness, and what they termed "wit," which she held amongst her family; and now, having been summoned home for the openly-declared purpose of captivating the son of her father's old client, what an imputation—what an ineffaceable slur—would rest upon her vaunted talents, should she fail to effect the conquest!

Yea, even beyond the house, and many miles off from the tattling town of Etheridge, Phebe knew for a certainty that her proceedings were being narrowly observed, and most curiously canvassed. Divets, Barclays, Mudges, there was not one of them out of the nine-and-twenty guests who had assembled at the late glorious anniversary, eating of the fat and drinking of the sweet—singing and romping, shouting and speechifying—who had not a perfect understanding of the plan now in course of development beneath the hospitable roof-tree under whose shade they had caroused so long and lustily: not one of the triple nomenclature had failed to penetrate the real motive of Divet's pressing invitation to the rich Mr. Frere; and

ready though they might be to overwhelm her with congratulations and wedding-gifts in case of her ultimate triumph, there was not one who would not be equally ready, and more truly pleased, to laugh at her discomfiture. The moment which should witness Frere's departure from Etheridge, unshackled by promise—unfettered by vow—that mortifying moment must proclaim the downfall of Phebe as the flower of her family and the pride of the Divets for feminine tact and ability.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONLY ONE LITTLE GAME ?

THE observant Divets forgot their previous misgivings as they watched the progress Phebe was making in Frere's good graces, and David especially grew as sanguine as he had lately been desponding. Then, when the little Divet had spent sufficient time behind the screen, she joined the family group, and, accosting them with mock deference, begged to know if her papa had any advice to bestow upon her future conduct; or if her very clever sister would oblige her with a hint, "a word in season, as dear Mrs. Mudge would say;" for "of course such an *inexperienced* young creature must be quite incompetent to the management of her own affairs." Then, without much further circumlocution, Phebe began to expatiate upon her opening prospects, and describe what she would do, and how comport herself when she should take her place as mistress of Old Court; speaking in a tone as assured and decided as if its master had already given her a legal title of admission there, and lamenting that Miss Palliser's wedding-day would probably precede her own, as it would prevent her having the gratification of offering her cousins, the

Husseys, the use of Mr. Frere's country-seat as a retreat during the honeymoon. "For I beg every one of you to bear witness," said Phebe, "that though I shall be wonderfully exalted over all my relations, yet I mean to behave with such humility that it will quite take the world by surprise. I shall make a practice of encouraging the Divets on all suitable occasions; and if I cut the Mudges utterly dead—which may probably happen after my presentation—I shall shew the greatest consideration in patronising the Barclays."

"There is one of the name who will save you any trouble on that score," her brother-in-law moodily replied.

"But," said Kezia, taking up the word with a very different expression, "his wife will be charmed to take advantage of her saucy little sister's condescension. *She* will never refuse an invitation to Old Court, Mrs. Manley Frere may assure herself of that."

"Lord bless you—no!" said cousin Sally, joining in the laugh. "We'll all go the very moment we are asked, every man-John of us. Won't we, Davy, my boy?"

Again Maria Palliser, thoroughly alive to the coarseness and indelicacy of all this, saw nothing in it but what was despicable, and therefore—for so she judged—innocuous. And greatly did she bless the kind star—the clear, mild, glorious planet, which had risen on Frere's nativity—that Phebe's outward charms were not such as to atone for her moral obliquities. She continued to observe what was passing, therefore, with

curiosity, and often with infinite disgust ; but scarcely once were her apprehensions aroused for the event of Miss Divet's machinations. Some annoyance more than ordinary must indeed be felt, when she saw Mr. Frere's grave and even melancholy expression relaxing gradually beneath the influence of Phebe's artful advances ; never had she heard his laugh till this false girl came amongst them, and, when it first reached her ear, she hurried from the unwonted sound, contemning as she went the wiliness of the one sex and the weakness of the other, till a juster appreciation of Frere's true condition convinced her that what caused his trial constituted also his apology !

A less prejudiced spectator must have given Miss Divet credit for the aptness with which she seized every advantage presented to her. The game of chess, often found so useful as a medium of flirtation, was, under existing circumstances, a mode of attack so glaringly apparent that Phebe might scarcely seem to merit praise for adopting it ; yet the boldness and determined perseverance which she displayed in carrying her point must not be overlooked. Frere had latterly declined playing ; the game, for which he had no particular partiality, was not in the present case rendered attractive to him by such an amount of skill in his opponents as might have sufficed to rouse the spirit of emulation lying dormant within him ; and, when the little Divet first proposed it, he gave her a flat refusal. But she was resolved that he should play with her, and play he did. She brought the board, she placed the men, and though he told her

rather seriously—"No, Phebe, not now—I am busy, I have letters to write—besides, I am not in the humour for playing," still she persisted; seating herself at his table, and looking up at him with such arch entreaty, that few could have seen her face at that moment without allowing that there was something in it, if not actually pretty, more really attractive than prettiness itself.

"One little game!" she begged imploringly, holding the slate before him, as she wrote—"Only one—one little—little—little—little—" the word was scribbled over and over again, from one end of the slate to the other. Frere could not help smiling at what seemed her childish importunity; still he shook his head—"That letter must be finished by post-time. Go, silly child! I'll play with you some other time."

"You'll play with me whenever I ask you, young man, or I'll know the reason why!" said Phebe aloud; and, rising up, she made a regular attack upon him, seized the letter from his desk and the pen from his hand; whereupon a gay scuffle ensued, bordering so very nearly on the nature of a romp, that the Colonel's stately mistress bit her nails with vexation, and, lingering only long enough to ascertain that Phebe's point was gained, she left the vicinity of the chessboard in sore disgust: still it was not Frere on whom she reflected, but that arch-temptress, who had seduced him from the lofty, rational demeanour that was so admirable in the sight of Maria. She suffered a couple of hours to pass away before returning to the scene of action; and, lo! they were playing still. For it must be confessed that, with

Phebe for an adversary, Mr. Frere found the game a very different thing from what it had seemed when David or the gentle widow had sat opposite to him, either buried in dull silence, or gesticulating and grimaicing in a style that offended his nerves. With Phebe, the march of a castle or the skip of a knight often introduced some shrewd remark, or sprightly rejoinder, which protracted the game, but added greatly to its amusement.

And, as there was a game within a game to be carried on, Miss Divet took care that her smiles and roguish devices should sometimes give place to a pretence of deep attention, when she would ask him, with an earnest yet taking simplicity, "Why he did this?" or, "Why she should not do that?" and as he took pains to teach her—for Abelard was not the only man, by many and many an one, who has enjoyed playing the tutor to an agreeable woman—while thus he proceeded with scientific explanation, the little deceiver, with her eyes intelligently fixed on his, and lips that scarcely moved, was all the time boasting to her audience before the screen of "How nicely she was taking in the p-o-o-r d-ear deaf man! Such a delicious case of humbug!" And sometimes it was Mrs. Barclay's cue to interfere, with an admonitory finger held up at her sister, and a hope expressed that Mr. Manley would not allow Phebe to worry him. "The naughty girl has always been the pet and plaything of the house, and we know that spoilt children will be troublesome sometimes."

It proved no trifling advantage to Phebe Divet in her designs upon Mr. Frere, that she was singularly young-

looking for her years. She had in fact passed that "phase" (as the moderns have it) of female existence, when spinsters may legally receive and pocket their own dividends ; but her figure was still so girlish in its proportions, and she commonly adopted such a careless child-like manner, that strangers were constantly deceived in her age. Frere fell into the usual error of supposing her a young thing, still considerably in its teens, and treated her accordingly—that is to say, with a good-humoured familiarity which was rather caressing than respectful. The evening of their first acquaintance was hardly over before he called her by her Christian name ; and though, slightly apologizing for the liberty, never more accosted her as Miss Divet.

He liked, he said, the name of Phebe ; it had lost the coldness of its classical derivation, and had come to breathe the soft atmosphere of pastoral life. "An air warm and perfumed," he repeated with a smile, his fancy wandering as he spoke from the simplicity of adornment which would have characterized the Phœbes of Grecian antiquity, but have ill accorded with Divet's little daughter, to the coquettish flutter of ribbons and garlands, with the pipes and crooks and other toys of the medieval Arcadia, in which the second race of Phebes had risen and flourished—a style incomparably better suited to the innocent yet arch-looking person before his eyes. "She could never aspire to be celebrated in an ode," he told her, "but might be well contented with the madrigal which supplied its place."

The Divets were highly delighted with all this. So

long as Frere's expressions seemed to imply a compliment to their "pet lamb," they had too little delicacy of feeling to demur at the style, however negligent, in which his approbation was conveyed.

Whenever any thing struck them as particularly favourable to the grand project they had in view, some report of it soon found its way to the Patriarch ; and on this occasion Divet incontinently shuffled off to the old gentleman's apartments, to boast that Manley Frere was already—"actually already"—addressing their little girl as plain Phebe, and likening her—"only think, my dear sir!—he has been comparing her to—what do you suppose?" rubbing his hands vehemently—"a shepherdess! nothing will serve him but she is like a shepherdess! She is a clever little thing, that must be allowed—devilish clever! Yes, he calls her a shepherdess! Capital, isn't it, sir? Admirable, by Jove!"

"Good, good!" came the answer, more deliberately given. "Our young man, then, comes on favourably you think, David?"

"Why, in fact, my dear father, what, considering all things, can be better? They have scarcely been in company with each other three times, and here he is complimenting her in the highest style. Ha, ha! a shepherdess! Upon my soul, it only surprises me how quietly and naturally every thing is coming round."

Old Divet echoed the chuckle of satisfaction, but in a tone of moderation. Unbounded presumption of success, even when the sun of prosperity seemed to shine the fiercest, was not for one who had practised law

and studied life for much the best part of his ninety years.

“And so he makes fine speeches to her already? and our little Phebe is to be his shepherdess! Ha, ha! She will have a singular swain in him, David;” and the old fellow’s sense of the ludicrous found vent in a soft laugh, and a peculiar twinkle of his deep-set eyes. “A deaf Corydon figuring in an eclogue would be something of a novelty, eh?”

“Never mind that, sir!” said Divet triumphantly. “There’s nothing like modern improvements: besides, I remember there was a song my grandmother used to sing us about a blind beggar of Bethnal Green. I don’t know what you may think; but in my opinion a deaf millionaire is quite as poetical as such an old fogie as that.”

“Just so, David; you have hit the mark exactly, my son—quite as poetical and much more to our purpose.”

While the Divets thus exulted over the development of their plans, Miss Palliser was curling her lip of scorn. “He treats her like a child,” she said, “and condescends to her as he would to a mere baby.”

“True,” was George Barclay’s reply; “but if you had seen as much of the world as I have, you would know that it is precisely of such children and such babies that men desire to take to themselves partners for life.”

From such short and unsatisfying conferences with a sympathizer, whose merits, except in one particular, were very questionable—who often differed from her opinions, and ended by violating her finer sense of right or pro-

priety—Miss Palliser always turned to Lucy Ainsworth as her only real confidant.

The cousins met but seldom, years having latterly passed without affording them the opportunity of renewing their personal intercourse, and exchanging face to face, the youthful confidences in which their friendship had originated.

Estimating character with an instinct of intelligence almost too quick and unerring, and a judgment ever verging towards the harsh, a nearer association with this cousin might have disappointed Maria, for her taste was growing every day more morbidly fastidious. But the style of her correspondent was sensible and affectionate, and in that leaning towards the sympathy of our kind which is so common to humanity, that even Miss Palliser's boasted self-sufficiency could not check the natural impulse. She had invested Lucy Ainsworth (a kind and intelligent woman, but never an enthusiast) with just the qualities which seemed to constitute her as a meet depository for the secret emotions of a heart which none beside herself had ever fathomed ; fanciful at times, and wild and deeply imbued as these feelings were with the despondency of a scepticism, which it was to be hoped that circumstances rather than any natural tendency had bred and fostered.

“ I never,” she said, “ have had the patience or resolution to keep a diary, though my letters to you bear very much the same character : not that I profess to tell even *you* all that passes through my brain ; yet if these letters of mine could be compared with the generality of

journals, it might be found that I am, on the whole, as open and honest with my cousin Lucy as most people are with themselves. Knowing the deceitfulness of the human heart, we cannot suppose that there are many whose daily memorial of their lives is the perfectly unbiassed and sincere thing they profess to make it ; for, to be sincere, it must be a transcript of the writer's very self. In it he must drag to light the secrets of his inmost soul, suffering no natural remorse or sense of shame to restrain him ; any reservation or self-deceit would cause a flaw in the crystal mirror which he is holding before his eyes. There must be a strict analysis of motives—base though they may have been—ay, basest of the base ! and a noting down in the plainest terms of every defeat that has followed his faint efforts at bettering his wretched nature. “ Lucy—do you imagine such a faithful chronicle has ever yet been kept by mortal man ? *I* do not. I believe there is not one in ten thousand who would have the candour so to examine themselves ; and that, if they had courage and honesty for such an inquisition, existence would become unbearable, and would be infallibly shaken off before the volume was half written through, or the life brought to a natural close. I speak not without experience, for I have often tried to set down a memorial like this ; but as often I have found that there was madness, or something more dreadful still, before me, should I persist in keeping it. I am justified therefore in saying, that no human being, with sufficient tenderness of conscience to describe himself as he really is, could bear the exposure, even though assured that it would meet no eye

but his own—that the book, still clasped, was to be laid by his side in the grave, and moulder into dust together with the hand that had traced the miserable record : still he would shrink from the task, as I have done.

“ But there is an easier and lighter sort of journalizing, the common propensity for which I have evidently not escaped, or I should not be so often troubling you with the details of my present life ; for I know you can feel nothing but disgust when I describe these Divets to you ; and as for Mr. Frere, you, having never seen him, cannot be expected to enter into my feelings towards that most interesting person. But though I have acquired this idle habit of narration, I have no taste for sitting down at the close of every day to tell myself what has happened to that self during the hours of activity. I must have something of a correspondent to write to, even if it should be a reluctant one—some shadow of a shade of a confidant. So that, even if my letters are thrown into the fire half read, I should still address my diary to you rather than to myself ; satisfied that, when it had served its purpose of present amusement, it would never rise up, a thing of shape and substance, to accuse my conscience in time to come.”

It was in answer to the very letter from which this extract has been made, that Miss Ainsworth, as if desirous to vindicate herself from the suspicion of being that contemptible cipher of a friend alluded to—that shadow of a shade of a correspondent—took occasion to reflect somewhat pointedly on the writer's mode of expression.

Though denying any ardent attachment to Colonel Hussey (for indeed she constantly rebutted the suggestion, that the weak passion of love could ever, or in any case, gain dominion over her), yet Maria had always proclaimed a very high respect for her future husband ; professing to have engaged herself to him only for the sake of his solid virtues, and estimating these at their full value.

Such had been her language up to the period of her residence at Etheridge House ; since when it had altered perceptibly. Instead of the correct though moderate terms in which she had been wont to extol her Colonel, there was shortly no praise of him at all ; and then a mist of dissatisfaction gathered about the subject, too thin and unsubstantial to call immediately for the timely comments of a friend, yet gradually thickening into something which threatened one day to be a heavy thunder-cloud.

Allusions to the absent lover grew less and less frequent, and, when they did occur, were made in a spirit of peevish detraction : the most alarming circumstance in this change of style being the undeniable fact, that what defect soever Miss Palliser took to dispraising in her professed admirer, she was pretty sure to contrast by some opposing perfection in the person, mind, or manners of the Divets' deaf guest. What wonder, then, that the discreet Lucy Ainsworth should ask herself, in some anxiety, whether this Mr. Frere might not be varying his amusements at Etheridge by undermining the affections of Maria ? or resolve, before it was too late, to

act up to the friendship she professed for her kinswoman, and boldly set before her the danger of her position ?

She waited only for a fair occasion of interfering—for something tangible to lay hold upon, and make the ground of a serious representation ; and it offered itself at the conclusion of this very same letter, in the form of a comparison between the respective constitutions of Colonel Hussey and Mr. Frere, terminating as usual greatly to the advantage of the civilian.

Perhaps the Colonel *was* too apt to enlarge upon his trifling ailments, and did not evince the best possible tact in making them the principal subjects of his letters ; yet this was no new feature in his character or correspondence, but had long ago been noticed by his bride-elect : though never until now animadverted upon so severely.

In mild but forcible terms, therefore, Miss Ainsworth put the question to her cousin, How—seeing that the slight indispositions of a lover were so distasteful to her, and excited such marked displeasure—she would be able to endure the complaints of a husband ? Where was she to find toleration and temper to meet the heavier dispensation, when called upon to tend Colonel Hussey through some severe attack—or perhaps a lifelong malady ? Then, adverting to her enthusiastic mention of Mr. Frere, Miss Ainsworth proceeded.

“ I could allow much for a generous sympathy with the unfortunate, but that there is something in the style of your letters—especially the last—that leads me to suspect you would not be so apt to lose your temper with the Colonel, if you were not in some danger of losing your

heart to this deaf gentleman. Considering the peril to your peace of mind which this supposition involves, I make no apology for hazarding it. If I am mistaken, you, my dear Maria, will allow for the officiousness of true friendship ; but if my words shall have enlightened you as to the nature of your feelings, I am convinced, from my knowledge of your delicacy and high principle, that you will exert your best energies in extricating yourself from a very dangerous position."

The answer to these searching questions arrived promptly, but afforded little satisfaction to the judicious interrogator.

"You think me severe on the Colonel," Maria replied, "and ask me how I should have patience to nurse him through a serious illness ? You forget what has been my vocation during the best years of my life, or you would not ask such a question as that. Colonel Hussey, though tiresome enough, can never be so distasteful a subject in sickness as those whom I have already had to deal with ; yet I have never been found wanting in consideration towards *them*—for, whatever my faults have been, I cannot accuse myself of actual hardness of heart : it is the infirmities of the mind that disgust me, not those of the body. Therefore, in the case you imagine so trying to my disposition, I should have no fear for either the patient or the nurse—he in enduring his sufferings with decent fortitude, and I in doing my utmost to alleviate them. But what I *do* fear, Lucy, even unto loathing, is the being required to listen day after day to a description of petty ailments, such as any

grown man with a proper sense of self-respect would conceal from all ears save those of his physician ; and, say what you will, the Colonel does *not* raise himself in my opinion when he thinks to make his letters acceptable to me—*me* of all people!—by reciting his daily complaints, his palpitations (physical, Lucy, not mental), his qualms on this side, and his spasms on the other, varied by an occasional eulogium on some famous specific which he takes to relieve him, and which he always carries about with him in his waistcoat pocket—probably the same pocket in a corner of which my miniature reposes!

“But enough of this—for a heavier charge (as such at least you regard it) remains to be answered. You urge it on me as a fault that I am sensible of the merits of Mr. Frere, and estimate him higher than the Colonel. And what should I be worth if I were blind to them? and where would be my discernment if I failed to see his superiority, not only to Colonel Hussey, but over every living being? I glory in the power I discover in myself of appreciating what is so truly excellent, and have no hesitation in owning, that my only idea of earthly happiness would be the living with him for the rest of my existence ; conscious that, in some slight degree, I was ministering to his comfort or amusement, and feeling my own erring nature growing more pure and hopeful, through the influence of his bright and blessed example. It is true also, that since I have known this gentleman my own prospects have acquired a darker—or at least a more dusky—tinge than ever. But fear not for me,

Lucy—what I experience for Manley Frere is no turbulent passion, dangerous to my conduct or tranquillity ; it is a sentiment that may increase my despondency, but must sanctify my life.

“I see before me a career of constraint and dissatisfaction—days passed in irksome employment, and society for which I have no taste, compared to which a solitude as of the desert would be luxury and delight. But to what purpose shall I have been endowed with an intellect a few degrees superior to the generality of my miserable sex, and a will which I know requires only equivalent energy in its development, to be omnipotent in its freedom and power—to what end have been my mental examinations, and the careful analyzing of almost every thought that has risen to my mind, if I have not strength to sustain the destiny awarded me? I will not conceal from you, that since my stay at this house I have more than once contemplated the propriety of breaking my engagement with Colonel Hussey ; but cannot convince myself that such a step would be advisable for either of us. In his case, I should inflict pain and mortification upon one of the sincerest and kindest natures in the world—and for myself, what should I gain by disconnecting myself from the only being but yourself who ever cares for, or wastes a thought on, me? I should have immediately to enter into some unknown state—to become the companion of other Divets : for I know they are but a type of the world they live in. My poverty, whatever choice I make, must keep me essentially dependent, and therefore it must be evidently better

for me to be the lawful property of one true, well-meaning person, than to sink into utter degradation as the slave of many, whom I could neither love nor respect.

“ Here, then, will I make my stand. No one will ever know the conflict of my life, and it may be sterner even than I apprehend ; but, instead of sinking hopelessly under the burthen, or rushing in cowardly haste from an existence yet unproved, my strength shall be sustained, and to myself made manifest, by living as it were a double life. My moving, speaking, acting self shall be all devoted to the good man who has blindly chosen me for his companion. I will harden myself to bear with his weaknesses, as though they were hidden from me, and welcome the society which our position brings around us with an aspect of content. I will be just if I cannot be generous, and give him all the kindness I can, in return for the love and confidence he lavishes on me. But then, that I may be fitted to endure this daily martyrdom of constraint—this shame of eternal falsity—I must cherish another life within myself ; one of mental activity : the thoughts which I dare not put forward, because they would frighten my husband and shock his friends, these I will follow in secret ; in the deep obscurity of the innermost being, into which, when we please to turn the key of exclusion, no living soul can penetrate. There will I actually live, and gather all the happiness I am capable of tasting—there, in those secret cells of the brain, retire to recruit my strength for the daily struggle. Once I believed that no gentler theme would occupy this inward life than abstract speculation—

dreams and theories, ever recurring and never to be satisfied, of the future and the infinite. I am awakened from that error ; and perhaps it has been well for me that I have passed through it. My life of active duty will not be less profitable to others, nor my secret thoughts surely less consoling, because there will be one bright, star-like object on which my mournful memory will desire to linger. No one can be injured by this secret pleasure ; for so hidden will it be from all but you, that if there be indeed a future existence—forgive that ‘if,’ Lucy ! To you alone do I ever whisper the doubt which has possessed me—miserable wretch that I am !—ever since my thoughts grew into shape and purpose. But if in truth my spirit, freed from a sad existence here, should wander bodiless in worlds beyond, there to encounter his, I shall meet him without shame, and revel undauntedly in the consciousness of his presence ; for he will never know in this life, and perhaps in a higher sphere may never conjecture, what he has been to me.

“ Thus freely have I opened myself to one who, throughout the whole term of our intercourse, has shewn herself as wise as she is faithful ; for, in venturing this confession, I trust, my dear Lucy, even more to the clearness of your understanding than to the partiality of your esteem. While there are many who would shrink from me after this free transcript of my feelings, you—who know and have greater discernment in appreciating the influence of my early and peculiar discipline—will be neither surprised nor alarmed to find me judging and

determining very differently from those who have been reared under an opposite course of training. Still, if a shadow of anxiety rests upon your friendly heart as to my future career, and that of my good though dyspeptic Colonel, consider, I entreat you, that here there is not even a struggle between duty and inclination; I and my poor pretensions being so utterly overlooked, so ignored by Mr. Frere—who, though he treats me, whenever we are together, with a courteous attention far more acceptable to my taste than the familiarities he falls into with Phebe Divet, has never in the course of our acquaintance distinguished me with the slightest particular notice—and would not, I will answer for it, if we were to live together as we are now doing for twenty years to come. Ah! would that that could be!

“No, Lucy, such women as circle around him here—and I include myself sincerely amongst the number—such women are not of the mould or manner that can take his calm, lofty nature by surprise. They say his Barbara was most beautiful, endowed with all sorts of accomplishments, and with manners that none could resist—they *say* so; but it is hard to believe that she, who has treated him so heartlessly, can in any thing resemble this description. I have formed the idea of her cold, glittering eye and false smile, till the image of my fancy seems all but real; and I feel convinced that, if I sought her in a crowd, there would be some sympathy of repulsion between us—an instinct of dislike that would point her out to me at once.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHEPHERDESS MAKES A FALSE MOVE, CAUSING HER
ADVERSARY TO CASTLE HIS KING.

MISS PALLISER'S letter was duly finished, and all but sealed, when across the last half page came a hurried postscript: Colonel Hussey had arrived earlier in the week than she expected him—"I believed myself safe for at least three days longer," she remarked; "but there is no reprieve for me in this world." Then she went on to censure what she called "this freak" of the Colonel's, "so foreign to his usual deliberate habits; and there are people who, having formed a character for consistency, would do well not to transgress it unnecessarily. How often have I heard him say—for he makes no scruple of repeating a pet aphorism pretty often—that 'surprises were foolish things;' and now he is practising upon me the very thing he despises!"

There had been time only to scribble this ungrateful paragraph, but not to repent of it, when, lo! there came a drumming at Miss Palliser's door as of twenty full-sized knuckles, instead of the moderate allowance commonly apportioned to woman; while the voice of cousin Sally thundered to her not to "shilly-shally about dressing up in her best beseems; for you know, my

dear," said she, putting her shrewd yet good-humoured face within the doorway—"you know as well as I do, that Ben Hussey would rather have you come down to him in a grogram gown and a stuff apron, than the Queen of Sheba all bedizened to meet King Solomon."

Maria, hastening to seal her letter, answered she was quite ready, and, with a forced vivacity that sat very awkwardly upon her, kept talking much faster than usual; amongst other irrelevant matters, asking Mrs. Sarah, as they went together down-stairs, "What was the meaning of the word grogram? What sort of stuff could it be? Was it what they used to wear for penitential garments? And did cousin Sally really think Colonel Hussey would like her to meet him in sackcloth and ashes?"

There was something so unlike herself in the sound of Miss Palliser's laugh, that the old lady, in her gruff but sensible way, requested her "not to talk such nonsense," and so they completed their descent from the upper story.

A world of thought may be entertained even in coming down an ordinary staircase at an ordinary pace. The foot must plod step by step till it reaches the solid floor or the stone pavement; but where is the limit assigned for the brain which gives the impulse to that foot? What measured gradation or final resting-place shall ever be found for that? Waking or sleeping it must still work on, and each round of the mental ladder be formed of some human thought, implying the power of transgression—if not the very act itself.

To judge by Maria's expression as she effected this short transit to the presence of her betrothed, she might have been suspected of forming some important resolution in which his interests were specially involved. But her disposition, though perverted, was not devoid of generosity, and it was somewhat to the credit of the human nature she was so prone to depreciate, that the meeting of this morning, instead of heightening the irritability caused by Colonel Hussey's sudden appearance, served materially to allay it. Indeed, it would have argued a want of the very commonest elements of feminine sensibility, had she encountered his warm greeting without some touch of compunction for the ungrateful sentiments so lately harboured against him—him, who had never in thought, word, or deed, evinced one disloyal thought towards her !

She had been so busy for some time past cavilling at every foible of his, and magnifying his least defect, that the Colonel's better qualities were vanishing fast out of her remembrance ; so that, when she met him speaking and moving exactly in his usual fashion, and as he was wont to do when his company had been the most acceptable to her, and had constituted, without doubt, the pleasantest solace of her isolated condition—then the impression of those old times (for old they seemed to her now) came back and settled upon her heart ; and, even as she lamented and excused the obduracy of that heart, it grew softer, and more susceptible of less selfish imaginings.

In this critical point of their intimacy, Colonel

Hussey's quiet manners stood him in excellent stead. Had he approached his faltering mistress in the character of an impassioned adorer, he would have been insufferable to her, but she was spared that trial ; for though the absence which had partially alienated her had served but to heighten his true affection, his mode of address was still that of a tender and devoted friendship, displayed in all things that could minister to the welfare and gratification of its object, rather than by the demonstrations of a sighing swain.

But perhaps what touched Maria more than every thing else in the behaviour of her affianced husband, was the perfect and implicit reliance with which he regarded her, she knowing all the while how grievously she was deceiving him. The signs of that great change which had actually past over her since their last meeting, her absent manner and hurried articulation, were not entirely lost upon him, but his observations never took the form of jealousy or distrust ; himself incapable of a thought unfaithful to his Maria, the good Colonel never for an instant suspected her of infidelity towards himself.

For the first time in her acquaintance with Colonel Hussey, Miss Palliser tacitly acknowledged herself the inferior being ; she had never thought his face remarkable for expression, yet this day she could not look steadily upon it, but felt her eyes ever sinking abashed beneath his gaze, as it rested upon her, beaming with such trustful, calm security ; nor, as he went on quietly chatting with her, could she observe how much his thoughts had been occupied by her, and how, in the preparations for their

marriage and subsequent voyage, her satisfaction and convenience had been ever his chief concern, without applying to herself the unintentional reproach, and wishing, in sad sincerity, that she were better able to reward the unmerited devotion of so kind a nature.

Mr. Frere, who had been abroad all the morning, did not return home till long after the Colonel's arrival ; yet even his entrance failed to turn the rational course of her reflections, or materially disturb the good resolutions she had been forming.

The very slight link of sympathy which had seemed to connect Maria with this interesting and unfortunate man, when on that one happy day she had walked by his side as his interpreter and adviser—this sweet impression of mutual understanding—was never to be renewed ; another had taken her place. The Divets, who, to do them justice, were seldom backward in kindness to their poor neighbours (though a certain bustle and love of publicity was apt to herald their good deeds), had accompanied their deaf guest to the scene of the conflagration ; and there, at the ruined village, Miss Palliser could picture to herself how effectually, and yet with a show of perfect simplicity, he and Phebe had been coupled and associated together ; that ready little person filling the gentle office that *she* had found so strangely sweet—and filling it, no doubt, so well—with such clever alacrity—such easy bright-eyed cheerfulness !

There was some aching of the heart as this vision crossed Maria, yet it had its use in drawing her closer still to her unsuspecting lover, pointing him out as her

sole stay and support; the only real friend she had to look to for the reciprocation of those human sympathies which she was tardily learning to appreciate; therefore she checked the sigh that was bursting from her bosom as an offence against him, and for herself a luxury too great to be indulged.

A more common mind than Maria's might have sought comfort in reflecting that if her fancy had gone astray for once, the error, short-lived and quickly repented, was far transcended by that most absurd delusion which her host and his daughters were so sedulously nursing; but to Maria, the bare possibility of being justly compared in conduct or feeling with any of the Divets, was but another cause for self-condemnation. And we may observe, in further illustration of this sentiment of aversion, that within the range of imaginable topics, there was not one which threatened so seriously to lower her esteem for Colonel Hussey, and her faith in his principles and propriety, as the indulgence he uniformly displayed towards the designs and unblushing conduct of his relations. It struck her as a circumstance no less strange than unlucky, that they should differ thus widely on a subject to her so peculiarly interesting, and one the discussion of which it was scarcely possible for her to escape. Miss Palliser forgot that it was because the subject peculiarly touched her feelings, that she was rendered so sensitive about the Colonel's opinions. Many a matter of taste or feeling might have been discovered, affording as complete an opposition of sentiment between herself and her future husband as this; but, being ques-

tions of perfect indifference to her, they were suffered to pass into oblivion, without care or comment. Here a partiality acknowledged only to her own heart, and her correspondent Lucy Ainsworth, caused her to be doubly observant, and, wherever the Colonel was concerned, little less than hypercritical.

Her lover bore on ordinary occasions the impress of a gentleman, yet something verging on positive vulgarity affected his tone of thought and expression whenever he referred to the deaf guest ; and Miss Palliser would have gone miles to avoid the mortification of hearing the Colonel make what he called "the agreeable" to Frere. With overstrained gesticulation and misplaced emphasis, he would commence in a consequential key some rigmarole about himself and his future destination, including some notice of the yellow fever at Gibraltar, and interspersed with sundry allusions to his own state of indigestion and dyspepsia ; which hard word producing a wondering look from Frere, fully justified the unanimous interference of the whole family—cousin Sally vociferating her loudest—to make it intelligible, while Kezia's slate and Phebe's pretty fingers came equally into play.

From a slight dialogue thus carried on, the good Colonel turned to his betrothed, and in a tone of infinite content and complacency said, "And so, my love, I find you make it out better with poor Frere than you expected. Ah, Maria !" and he regarded her with an arch yet approving smile, "I shall oblige you to confess, after all, that I comprehend you better than you do yourself. I was sure you would find good-humour and patience

enough to meet any occasion where such qualities were demanded—quite sure ;” and taking a hand of his fair friend in one of his, while he gently and deliberately patted it with the other (a favourite mode with the good Colonel of expressing the overflowings of his manly tenderness), he added—“ When was my Maria ever deficient in kindness and compassion towards the unfortunate ? ”

“ I have little occasion for the exercise of any such virtues,” she coldly replied. “ Mr. Frere has a fund of acquirements that render him quite independent, and place him very far above any efforts *I* could make to amuse him.”

“ Poor fellow ! ” said the Colonel complacently—“ I am glad to hear it. Yes, I remember hearing he was a good linguist, and pottered a little in botany and that kind of thing. But, for all that, I am given to understand that our deaf friend shows no objection to the assistance of a certain fair lady in passing away the dull hours of the day.”

Miss Palliser answered the Colonel’s knowing smile with a curl of her contemptuous lip. “ If you allude to the matrimonial designs which this family have formed with regard to him, I think both you and they will shortly discover how foolishly their time has been wasted in the pursuit.”

He was surprised, and altering his tone said, “ Why, even the Patriarch considers the thing all but settled, for he told me so himself when I went to pay my respects to him just before dinner ; and look at them—just look at them now—Maria ! What do you say to that, eh ? ”

But Miss Palliser refused to see any thing suspicious in what the Colonel referred to—Phebe busily talking to Frere with her little hands, and he looking down upon her with that air of civil superiority, which Maria thought was never more evident than when he came in contact with this artful girl; answering her a careless word now and then, and occasionally smiling at what she said, or perhaps at the glance of her arch little eyes. The Colonel's mistress drew herself up disdainfully—"An ordinary man," she said, "might be in danger; but there is too much both of pride and delicacy in Mr. Frere to allow of his becoming the dupe of Phebe Divet."

"Humph!" the Colonel stiffly rejoined; "Mr. Frere may do a worse thing for himself than marry *my* cousin Phebe."

"As she is your cousin," said Maria softening her tone, "and as I am profiting by the hospitality of her family, I must take heed how I express myself; but I think I know what you would say if you were to see any other family acting like the Divets—leaguings together to ensnare a man of Mr. Frere's rank and fortune, and especially one whose circumstances ought to give him a peculiar claim on their protection as well as respect. I am sure you would consider that *he*, of all persons, should be held sacred from such interested designs."

"But don't you see, my love, that it is this very peculiarity in the circumstances of poor Frere that places the question with regard to him and Phebe out of the common line of argument? Supposing him to be enjoying all his faculties like other people, there could be but one opinion on the subject; but with disadvan-

tages like *his*, poor fellow ! he may be reckoned only too lucky if he should get such a nice little wife as Phebe Divet to take care of him. Depend on it, Maria, that is the view that will be universally taken of this matter. Why, even you yourself, my dear girl," and here the pappings, which had subsided during the heat of discussion, were resumed with such spirit that it required all Miss Palliser's resolution not to draw her hand away.

" I do full justice to the generosity of your nature, and am persuaded you would cling to the man of your choice through every accident that might befall him—nobody acquainted with my Maria can doubt her stability; but put yourself for a moment—just for a moment—in Phebe's place, and fancy what it would be to have to twiddle your fingers as she is now doing all day long, or speak through a tube, or shout like Mrs. Sarah. Ah, Maria, Maria !" and the Colonel laughed triumphantly, " I see you shrink at the bare mention of such a life, and the recapitulation of such sad duties. And no wonder, my love: amiable as you are, you need not be afraid of confessing a feeling which must be natural to all your sex. So, with that conviction on our minds," added the Colonel cheerfully, " let us not grudge poor Manley Frere the lucky chance that has fallen to his lot, or inquire too narrowly into the motives and views of the good-natured girl who volunteers to make him happy. And, prejudice apart, Maria, we must allow that she manages our deaf friend to perfection—eh ? See how the little rogue humours and plays about him ! Ha, ha ! Very well, Miss Phebe ! very well, indeed !"

“Isn’t she admirable, Ben?” said Divet, who had fidgeted up to the lovers near enough to catch something of the Colonel’s applause. “Doesn’t she do it capitally? Twists and turns him whichever way she likes, by Jove! And now she is taking his dogs in hand. Bravo, bravo! The little vixen adapts every thing to her purpose—turns every thing so neatly to account. Upon my soul her abilities perfectly astonish me—they do, indeed!”

“Yes,” said Miss Palliser, as David shuffled off again; “the very animals in this house—the innocent, unconscious animals—are made subservient to the plots and double-dealing that is carried on in it!”

In explanation of which caustic remark, it must be mentioned that, as a likely means of attracting Frere’s attention to herself, Phebe Divet had constituted herself preceptress to the two dogs, his constant companions—had been teaching them a variety of little comic tricks, such as to stand erect on their hind-legs, beg, ring the bell at the word of command, and even occasionally to carry notes and written messages to their master, establishing thus a new and whimsical sort of correspondence, which could not, she judged, be otherwise than favourable to her plans. And as these lessons, whether they resulted in the proficiency of the pupils, or the disappointment of the teacher, were rendered by Phebe’s clever acting equally entertaining to her audience, the device seldom failed of success, and, by means of his four-footed satellites, Frere was often won to take an interest not otherwise to be awakened in the witching ways of Miss Divet.

Still there was a desired point which Phebe failed to compass, and Miss Palliser directed Colonel Hussey's attention to it, as a proof of the very little real influence the young lady had secured over the deaf guest. Shako, the Skye terrier, was resigned to her without a struggle; he was young and frivolous, his master said, "a coxcomb at heart, and brimful of egotism; so Phebe might do what she pleased with him: her drilling and lecturing could not make of *him* a more shallow puppy than he was before. But Jock—good old Jock"—caressing as he spoke the larger and older dog, Frere's tried friend as well as follower—"never should Jock be indoctrinated after any such fashion: his virtues were complete, and, for his manners, modern accomplishments would but corrupt their simplicity." Jock, agreeing in the opinion that it was a work of supererogation for him to go to school again, turned an ear almost as deaf as his master's to Phebe's winning voice, and an eye infinitely more suspicious upon the gestures she employed to coax and delude him.

Backed by that beloved master, whose look was law to him, and whose slightest whistle sufficed to keep him a willing prisoner at his side, Jock on ordinary occasions held out successfully against that mysterious power of fascination we have elsewhere ascribed to David's daughter, but which seemed to possess no magic for the sensible old dog. Still there had been seasons in Jock's Etheridge experiences when he too had succumbed to the fatal influence—when Frere, sunk in thought, or occupied to the exclusion of outward things, sat with

averted looks, oblivious to his favourite's temptations, here Jock's unaided resolution had been unequal to the occasion. When Phebe had lured him with some savoury morsel, stealthily offered to his notice round the corner of the Indian screen—the remnant of nice plum-cake, or fragment of toast saturated with butter, or any other dainty known to be particularly acceptable to Jock; then indeed the strife between duty and inclination waxed fierce and hot, and its symptoms shewed that Frere's petted companion was very far from being the stoic he would have had the world suppose him. A tremulous motion would take place in Jock's limbs, and his tail betray a reluctant inclination to wag. His uneasy looks would wander from the gay little temptress to the face of his unconscious master: he would fain execute a gape of indifference, but, checking the movement midway, licks his longing lips. Then those sparkling eyes of Phebe's shew signs of triumph, for she loves to conquer, though it be but a four-footed thing that confesses her sway; and here we know she is meditating a double victory, and foresees the owner's fate in that of his dog.

And so the trial between artifice and honesty ends in the capture of poor Jock—who, with a vain but most expressive glance of appeal towards Frere, ventures from his side, and follows the bait with shamefaced reluctance and watery jaws. Secured ere the morsel is down his throat, Jock must submit to the will of the victor, and his deaf friend dreams not of the favourite's fall till the barrier which divides them is suddenly

withdrawn, and his attention directed to the once respectable Jock, now sitting erect in an opposite corner, a shawl round his shoulders, a gay cap of Kezia's upon his head, and on his hairy nose a pair of the Patriarch's spectacles! His honest face shews how painfully conscious he is of the laughter and ridicule of which he is the object; but the crowning point of his humiliation is only reached when he sees his master—that kind, tender, considerate master—pausing a moment, and joining in the laugh before he interferes for his relief.

Some such interlude it was that at present elicited the applause of the Divets, and confirmed Colonel Hussey in his opinion that their hopes were well-grounded, notwithstanding that his mistress failed not to point out to him, as a fact highly significant of the real state of affairs, that Mr. Frere, much as he seemed to be indulging Phebe in her childish caprices, ended nevertheless by a polite but sufficiently peremptory intimation that Jock was *not* to be persecuted, but that she must content herself with Shako for a pupil: and even with regard to the younger dog there was a proviso made; for in teaching him to fetch and carry—"of course a most desirable accomplishment," Frere added, good-humouredly, "and one which would be extremely useful to himself and his master—still he should take it kindly if the fair instructress would select any other article of small compass to be forwarded to him by the jaws of Shako, rather than his own correspondence. It might be a formal prejudice on his part, but he certainly *did* prefer having his letters delivered to him with the seals un-

broken"—a circumstance which did not always happen when Shako was the messenger. Upon this the young lady went through a pretty little pantomime, expressive of her penitence at the mischief she and Shako had been guilty of between them—her father murmured his apprehensions that she was coming it too strong, "*much* too strong, Miss Divet!" and Mrs. George made gestures of sisterly reproof, as if warning her "pet lamb" not to take such liberties for the future. Frere as usual was fairly taken in by the family performance, but still the concession was to be all on Phebe's side—he maintained his good-humour undisturbed, but his position also, and his last words on leaving the room were, "You understand, Phebe—handkerchiefs are allowable—nosegays, as bordering on the sentimental, still better—but letters with solemn seals and postmarks are strictly prohibited."

"As if *his* letters were of such wonderful importance!" Phebe muttered as his back was turned, and her smiling aspect changed to one of angry contempt. The Colonel, as much deceived as Frere by the childish glee with which she had played her previous part, overlooked the blank expression that followed it. Not so his more sagacious mistress! She had lately taken up an opinion that Phebe Divet, while publicly upholding the glowing hopes of her family, and treating the deaf guest as a conquest so easy as to be almost beneath her abilities, was far from being so secure of her victory as she professed herself; and her present behaviour went far to confirm the suspicion. Had Miss Palliser been straitly questioned on the grounds of this conjecture, she

might hardly have ventured to adduce the slight and fugitive signs on which it was actually founded—some muttered word or passing glance of disgust or impatience, which, through all her pretended ease and satisfaction, betrayed something of the anxiety working within:

And Maria was not far wrong. Frere, ever courteous, often kind, and sometimes complimentary, was not the easy victim upon which Phebe had calculated; and the compliance with her whims and vagaries, which so delighted the Divets, she now and then suspected to be but the result of a careless indifference, any thing rather than flattering to her vanity, or encouraging to her views. She knew it was his melancholy creed, that his time had become a thing of no importance, and so, perhaps, he wasted a portion of the profitless commodity on little Phebe Divet. Her secret misgivings, nevertheless, whatever they might amount to, seldom threw Miss Divet off her guard, so as to make her lose sight of the character she aimed at maintaining; that, viz., of an intelligent, impulsive, but affectionate girl, a “child of nature.”

Once, however, incited by indomitable conceit, or rendered desperate by the slow progress she seemed to be making, the young lady had hazarded a new line of action; and, as a means of persuading Frere to some slight matter in dispute between them, had adopted a style, half fond, half sullen, unlike any thing she had ventured before; but there was that in the expression of the deaf man’s eyes that instantly warned her of her mistake, and she never incurred it again. It was not that he looked angry, or the least alarmed, but what was

passing seemed to strike him as a thing that might be called "comical," or at all events "unnecessary;" and Phebe positively hated him as he moved off with this doubtful expression playing round his mouth, and repeating to himself (yet not so softly but it reached her quick ears) the opening lines of some old-fashioned pastoral, which her name had brought to his recollection:

"My time, O ye Muses, was happily spent,
When Phebe went with me wherever I went!"

The slight touch of good-humoured satire conveyed by Frere's manner, haunted her long afterwards; and taking the hint with readiness, if not humility, she forebore for some time to follow her shepherd too closely, deaf as he might be, and manageable as she had falsely concluded him. Trivial as the discomfiture may seem, to Phebe it was painfully significant, and she carefully abstained from mentioning it, even to Kezia. One glance when they met again—one single glance into the countenance of Mr. Frere—set her at rest as to the consequences of her indiscretion. She saw in that clear index of his mind, that what had wounded her so deeply had passed out of his thoughts, probably with the termination of the insulting stanza. But though she breathed on that account with more freedom, his very indifference—his utter oblivion to the circumstance which had alarmed and irritated her—what was it but a plain declaration that the Phebe of real life, his "little friend," his "amusing little Phebe," was in very truth a thing of as slight concern to him, as the shepherdess of an old ballad?

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LECTURE ON LOVE.

LEAVING the little Divet to the uncertainty that is secretly tormenting her, we will learn from Frere himself to what extent her hopes or fears were justified by the sentiments he actually entertained towards her. It was not very long after this unlucky quotation, as he sat enshrined within the Chinese screen, and Phebe, sitting at his feet, was mending a minute hole in one of his gloves, that he thus referred to her in a letter to his friend the young rector.

The despatch began with matters quite irrelevant to Phebe, and it was not until these were fully and sufficiently discussed and done with, that he adverted to her at all ; and, giving the extract as it quietly flowed from Mr. Frere's pen, we leave it to the reader to determine how far the industrious little glove-mender would have been satisfied with a sight of that voluminous epistle to the Rev. Richard Cranston.

“ I verily believe I should have been out of England before now, for I was growing very weary of my way of life here, if it had not been for a recent addition to the family party. I like all the good people at Etheridge, it would be highly ungrateful if I did not ; but my sight

craves variety, I find the same faces constantly before me bring back old trains of ideas—and these, too, none of the happiest; in a word, I was growing stupified, and, spite of Divet's professional desire to settle my affairs, and the leases of 'those houses in Pimlico,' I should have been off to a certainty. But there is nothing like an infusion of young blood for restoring life and animation to a worn-out system; and I never was made more sensible of that fact than by the introduction of a fresh member of the family here, David Divet's youngest daughter. I hardly knew there *was* a younger daughter in the case till one day she came unawares upon me, adding a sort of surprise to her many good gifts. The house (except by me) can never I believe be reckoned dull. I observe an air of intelligent cheerfulness constantly pervading it; yet it is surprising how much the general liveliness has been increased since this little girl came amongst us. Pleasant looks expand more readily into smiles, smiles into laughter; every face seems to brighten and improve under the spell of her genial influence—always excepting that of her very disagreeable brother-in-law, whose nature is indeed most thoroughly opposed to hers, and my aversion to him daily increases, as I see how he scowls upon his sweet little sister.

“It is ten to one that, when grown people set themselves formally to the task (a heavy one I know it to be) of conversing with me, their well-meant endeavours result, as far as I am concerned, in an additional pang of humiliation—their laboured attentions cause my defects to stand out more prominently than ever; and, seeing the

stress they lay on my misfortunes, I fall to thinking of them too, when I would give the world to throw off the impression, and persuade myself I am not, after all, so different—so *very* different from other people. This awkward emotion, made up of pride, ingratitude, and a hundred other unholy whisperings, is seldom excited by the voluntary, untutored sympathy of the young, especially when I am holding converse with a natural creature such as Phebe Divet. She is too fresh, too artless, and I may add too wayward, to act from any thing but impulse. Her sympathies are all innate, self-springing, frankly tendered; and the light-hearted girl throws a charm around my solitary musings, which I shall miss when I leave her father's hospitable house. Like Moth, Mustard-seed, and their brethren, she 'hops in my paths, and gambols in my sight;' and, while I am thinking of any thing but her, I find her at my elbow, or crouching almost at my feet, looking up into my face with her little black eyes, that have always a sort of saucy expression in the midst of their kindness. And truly kind she is! No one who was not thoroughly amiable could take so much trouble for such an object. She would, if I would suffer it, waste hours in playing chess with me, pretending a great desire for instruction, though the kind deceit is easily discovered by her talking much faster than she plays. Then she insists on speaking with her fingers—I had a foolish prejudice against it, having, when I was a boy, been taken to see the pupils at the Deaf and Dumb Asylum (a grade lower in their condition than what I am become) go through their inge-

nious exercises. Happy and contented as they appeared, I had been any thing but easy during their exhibition—oppressed with what I could now imagine to have been some dim anticipation of my future fate. So I had felt shy of this finger language, though unable to deny its utility as a mode of communication ; but Phebe, with a gentle importunity (for which I have since felt truly obliged), soon overcame my unreasonable aversion ; and, as she executes her part in the intercourse with remarkable facility, I find it the pleasantest method of conversing that has yet been devised. Nevertheless, time wears on, and ennui will still be spreading his lead-coloured mantle over me oftener than I could wish. Little Phebe cannot be always talking to me, or I be always in the humour to be talked to ; I must go elsewhere, were it only to gather something of novelty for my letters to you ; for long ago, my dear Cranston, you must have been heartily sick of Etheridge, its ways and its vicinity. I intend Venice to be my next resting-place ; my first visit to it was but cursory, and I have much to examine there. As a subject for the pen it is hackneyed enough, but at least will be better for my faithful correspondent than a prosaic country town in old England, though there was a time when perhaps I might have turned even such a theme to some account.

“Accustomed as I have now grown to this finger-language, in which I hold such glib converse with my little Phebe, I am struck with a foolish surprise when I see two persons communicating wholly by means of their lips. Even as I write, there go Colonel Hussey and his

handsome mistress sauntering along the terrace before my windows—why the good folks here call it a terrace, by the by, it would be hard to say ; but it is a dry and sunny length of gravel, and doubtless answers the purpose of the lovers as completely as a daintier locality ; blest with the feelings that now possess them, it may be that the finest garden that Nature and Art together ever formed would not seem pleasanter in their eyes.

“Cranston, tell me, if you know, and seek for a reason if you have not one ready to your hand—why it is that lovers should invariably look stupid, and love-making appear to a spectator so dull and heavy a proceeding ? Why should that passion, which is acknowledged to be the most intense, ethereal, and vivifying of all that animates humanity—before which the lust of power, or fame, or even gold itself, gives way—which has inspired some of the highest virtues, and caused more than half the wickedness of the earth—why should its evidences, displayed in countenance, manners, and conversation, be such as to confer universal contempt instead of honour upon its votaries ? I put the question not so much in the profane spirit of ridicule, as in a modest search after truth. The friend you have desired for a life-long associate, the acquaintance from whom you have derived so much amusement, no sooner do they contemplate marriage—that most natural and satisfactory of human alliances—than they make themselves, in some way or other, insufferable to you and every other thinking creature ; and Christian charity itself can grant them only the same sort of indulgence which is shewn to a

drunken man by his boon companions—he is held to be, to all intents and purposes, a madman for the time being, and as such irresponsible. No doubt, from all we see and know, and perhaps feel, a man is never entirely sane when he has a woman in his head. I am far from quarrelling with him on that account: it is not the insanity, but the way in which he manifests it, that I would have amended. If the disease shewed itself in an honest, unequivocal effervescence—a something of the extra-frisky and strait-waistcoat kind—an inclination we will say to climb lamp-posts, and vault over five-barred gates, to smile upon his enemies, and give sixpence to a beggar where once he would have contented himself with a penny, or the half of that—such doings would be comprehended easily, and as easily excused. I can sympathize with many a wild escapade, the overflowing of a gay spirit which, seeing before him what the poor fool believes to be a life-long felicity, endures no bound to his soul-pervading joy. But when, instead of these pardonable freaks, I see a being, inspired by this noblest of passions, creeping and crawling by the apron-string of his beloved—his face ten times more stupid than usual, his talk twenty times as dull, a silly simper, or a disgusting leer being now his nearest approach to vivacity—how is it possible to preserve respect for the lover, or the sentiment which has metamorphosed him? or help wondering what there can be in the companionship of an agreeable woman to make a man of ordinary capacity look like an ass, and act like an idiot?

“I have wandered into a wide digression from the

Colonel, who, by the by, gives me a notion of being a sort of person who never in his whole life was guilty of *digressing* or *transgressing* either ; so that, though the sight of him certainly originated this philippic against the lovelorn fraternity, I doubt whether he comes under the common reproach. He is by no means past middle age ; yet there is a composure and sobriety in his whole deportment that would be sadly disarranged by any rapturous or frisky demonstrations—indeed, in his case, they are not wanted to convince us how happy he is in his rational and honest affection. We have only to look in the face of the good man, to be assured that his love—steady and disinterested in itself—is perfectly reciprocated. So, for the sake of consistency, I absolve the Colonel from any necessity for monkey-tricks ; for I am sure his calm-natured, sensible betrothed would never abide them.

Seldom have I seen a couple more completely matched : their statures, gait, and measured movements all coincide ; and the firmest believer in Shakspeare must allow, that the course of *their* true love is running unimpeded to the great ocean of wedlock—some people might term it the Dead Sea. From a certain look of high-minded abstraction, which I occasionally notice in this lady, I fancy her something of a devotee—not of the Calvinistic school, however ; for it would have amused you to see the magnificent scorn with which she turned over the leaves of a tract which a methodistical old lady, related to the Divets, contrived to shuffle in amongst the papers on my table (with a zeal which, even her favourite pastor must have allowed, had some lack of discretion in its mani-

festation); for whether she thinks that tracts are all perfect in form and composition, and therefore no choice can be requisite in their selection, or simply mistook the thing altogether, remains doubtful; but certain it is that the penny pamphlet, on which fell my bewildered eye when I was looking for something very different, was headed, 'Address to a young woman on her entrance into the allurements of life.' I smiled as it caught my eye, but Miss Palliser's frown was of such a sort, that I told her she looked worthy to encounter, single-handed, Mr. Butterfield and his whole congregation. And then her countenance, which is really very fine, was suddenly overspread with such a blush, and a smile so shy and gentle, that, on my honour, Dick, I began to think Colonel Hussey a more enviable person than I had yet supposed him.

"But I must have done, lest you should take to exercising the loquacious spirit that will be talking of nothing but the ladies. My next letter will most probably be dated London, where I earnestly hope you will be able to meet me. The pang it will cause me to see you, *you* cannot imagine; but I find it impossible to leave the country without incurring both the pain and the pleasure of such a meeting—so, if you are prevented from coming to me, why in that case the mountain must go to Mahomet."

Thus wrote the Divets' deaf guest, pouring into the breast of one, whose unfailing sympathy and fervent regard neither time nor absence could wear away, the feelings of his susceptible nature, and all those lighter

fancies which would still be springing from the varieties (apparently trivial) of his every-day life, and which he never dreamed of submitting to any human eyes save those of Richard Cranston. And it was in this tranquil and unconscious way that Mr. Frere contemplated a movement which was destined to quench the brightest hopes of the kind family who were entertaining him so hospitably. For, allowing that Miss Divet had confessed to herself some secret misgivings, her family, satisfied with the smooth surface presented to their view, were contented to receive mere friendship and familiarity as evidences of a much warmer sentiment; so that, when Frere addressed himself one morning to Mr. Divet in a rather more formal and business-like manner than usual, that gentleman had not a doubt but that he was going to propose for the hand of his youngest daughter. Consequently the look, or rather stare, of bewilderment and utter discomfiture with which he heard the deaf guest announce his departure the following week—the day, the very hour fixed—David's confusion, we repeat, was so evident, that Mr. Frere felt quite concerned for the vexation he was giving rise to; for it instantly occurred to him, if Divet were thus moved by the intelligence of his departure, what must be its effect upon the ladies?

Recovering as well as he was able from a shock so unexpected, David made the sort of gesticulation that he thought the occasion demanded, and got off to communicate the uncomfortable news to his father and daughter. It happened to be the hour of the forenoon

at which it was the time-honoured custom of old Jesse's descendants to assemble themselves in his sitting-room, there to inquire after his health, and discuss all the topics—national, local, or domestic—that might be occupying their attention at the time.

And a pleasant half hour it generally proved to be, and very unlike those stated visits to the elders of a house which so often, through the disagreeable qualities of the aged, or the failings of the young, or, perhaps, merely because such attentions *are* fixed and stated, become ceremonies full of constraint and formality. Far otherwise was it at Etheridge House, where, in the chambers of the oldest inhabitant, the juniors of the mansion ever reckoned on the shrewdest counsel—the readiest sympathy—and the keenest appreciation of a joke.

This morning the convocation was fuller than usual, Colonel Hussey being there in addition to the family ; besides that, in consideration to his feelings, and opposition to her own, Miss Palliser had forced herself to shew the same mark of civility to the old man, whom she usually did her utmost to avoid, and now sat listening to his remarks as they fell—half good-humoured, half-cynical—from his withered lips, with her characteristic coldness and suspicion.

To them entered David, his countenance, his gesture, (no triumphant rubbing of the hands or jingling of the halfpence now !) the very hang of his coat, and drooping of his shirt-collar, seeming to accommodate themselves to the vexation which filled his soul.

And now it was plain to mark the different reputa-

tions which attend on successful or unsuccessful knavery. The Colonel, who had nearly gone the length of blustering in defence of his relations when his high-minded Maria had cast a censure on their conduct, was himself struck with the altered aspect which they and their affairs had suddenly assumed. As long as their chariot-wheels had seemed to be moving prosperously, and at railway pace, the good Colonel had been well content to occupy a seat in the family coach, and join them in extolling the pretty prospects that were opening to their view, and anticipating the satisfactory termination of their journey.

In language less metaphorical, he had observed nothing but what was natural and proper in all that was going forward—had moralized complacently with Kezia, had subscribed to the outpourings of Divet's paternal exultation, and had had his joke with the Patriarch about Phebe's likelihood of going to court, and being made a fine lady for life.

But now, when he contemplated that family group under circumstances so greatly altered—the grace of fancied success no longer resting on them, and clothing each one as it were with a goodly garment—their tempers, once so gay and easy, now ruffled by unexpected disappointment—justifying themselves—accusing each other—cavilling, recriminating—he wondered how he could ever have afforded his own respectable sanction to the schemes they had been carrying on.

Nothing more grand than the flash and the roar, the destruction and triumph of gunpowder, when once the

match has taken effect, and the train ignited to an end, but lying in its barrel, without a chance of explosion, what is it but the dullest and dingiest of minerals? Let us consider for a moment what a magnificent affair the Gunpowder Plot would have been if it had only succeeded! Many a man of average virtue would have shouted and yelled on the side of the victors when in their pride of power, who would have cowered to the earth before the finger that pointed him out as an accessory to the grand attempt, when nothing was left of it but disappointment, and dread, and the certainty of a halter—and when the sublime of wickedness was to be represented only by a bundle of dry sticks and a dark lantern!

In this sudden revulsion of Colonel Hussey's feelings, it even seemed to him that the venerable grandsire himself shewed to less advantage than ordinary, as he sat, masking his own vexation, under the jeering tone in which he loved to animadvert on passing events.

The scene altogether became so repugnant to the Colonel, that he was glad to escape from it, and confide a portion of his altered sentiments to her whose freedom from every thing low or worldly seemed, by the contrast, to be doubly and trebly estimable.

"I believe you were right, Maria," said he. "There is something not quite so delicate as it should be in the proceedings of our friends here; and I am afraid they have laid themselves open to some ridicule, if not positive censure. But they have brought the mischief on themselves, and must get out of the scrape as they best may;" and the good Colonel accompanied his recan-

tation with that sort of shrug, compassionate and yet contemptuous, with which we are apt to remark on the merited mortifications of another. “And ah, Maria!” he added affectionately, as he patted the white hand he was so soon to call his own, “what a fortunate man I am, that, when I find myself fretted and discomposed by the conduct of even my best friends, I have *you* to turn to—*you* in whom I am *never* disappointed—always sincere! always consistent, all goodness, and all truth! My happiness makes a selfish being of me; for, while certain of your attachment, I cannot—upon my soul I really cannot—care for any thing that occurs elsewhere—I can’t indeed, my love! But there you are again, shrinking as usual from the sound of your own praises.”

“Ah! if you did but know how unmerited they are!” she answered, a spasm of remorse crossing her fine features: the emotion indeed was so powerful that her lips had opened to make some startling disclosure—not of her love for another, but of her indifference to himself—such as must have sufficed to separate them for ever; when the same look of trustful love which had conquered her resolution once before, again asserted its power over her. Seeing how his kind nature was bound up in her, and what pride and pleasure he took in her supposed excellence, she could not find the moral courage required to free herself and make him miserable. Thus the opportunity passed away; whether for good or evil, time was to discover.

Great as was undeniably the disappointment of the Divets, they were too politic to suffer it to be publicly

displayed when the first ebullition of their vexation had subsided. Besides that in the hearts of the ladies—that of Kezia at least—there existed still a hope that things were not utterly desperate. She felt strong in the possession of means, apparently slight, but in fact essential, through which, as she believed, Mr. Frere might be detained amongst them considerably longer than he proposed; and with his kindly feeling towards them all, and undoubted pleasure in Phebe's society, much might yet be accomplished in rendering his stay available for the grand purpose for which he had been originally invited to Etheridge. So, with admirable resolution, Mrs. George cleared her own brow, and tried to inspire a more sanguine spirit in the other members of the conspiracy; to keep Phebe from looking cross before Frere, when the failure of her declared designs upon him was made the subject of her brother-in-law's sneers or the rough joking of cousin Sally; and (though this was a matter still more hard to be effected) she strove to reanimate the hopes of her crestfallen father, ever "too soon dejected, and too soon elate."

Then, about this time, Mrs. Barclay might be seen occasionally (though seldom by Mr. Frere) in rather close consultation with his man: his factotum, his Figaro, Druce. When first the Divets placed this man about his person, Frere had been very little prepossessed in his favour—acknowledged his abilities, but liked not the expression of his face; and even resolved on getting rid of him, as soon as an opportunity presented itself of doing so without affronting those who had procured him so

excellent a servant. But as time wore on he got used to what at first annoyed him; this person proving himself indeed so thoroughly versed in all that constitutes a valet of first-rate qualities, that his prejudices were latterly overcome. For prejudices Mr. Manley allowed them to be, and even condescended to account for and excuse them, by discovering that Druce had a slight cast in the eye which gave the poor fellow "a sinister expression, most foreign to his real character."

When, with his usual openness, Frere confessed to Mrs. George his original dislike and subsequent approval of his body-guard, that lady listened to the frank admission with her smile of ready and earnest comprehension—that look so acceptable to one deprived of hearing, that it alone was enough to make him love the face in which it dwelled; and then away went Kezia's pencil, creaking along the little slate, to assure "good Mr. Manley" how truly her secret sympathies went with him in this respect. "I was confident you would not like him," said she; "for it was just my own case when first I saw poor Druce. You can't think the positively wicked antipathy I took to the honest creature."

"Nay, nay!" he answered her smiling. "I was not quite so intolerant. But surely nature is unkind when she puts such eyes as those in the head of a well-disposed serving-man;" and then he joined Kezia in extolling the usefulness of this man, congratulating himself on his possessing such a knowledge of French as would qualify him admirably for a travelling servant. Frere added, "His only apprehension was that Druce would reverse the

common fault of negligence, and be unnecessarily precise in his arrangements—at least in all that related to his master's supposed comfort. It had been his wish to leave England before that month was out; but Druce had almost insisted that there were certain portmanteaus, and things quite indispensable to such expeditions; though he himself knew he could do very well without them, and, if he waited till the orders were executed, he must be detained much longer than he intended."

Nobody would have guessed the dissatisfaction conveyed in these words of Frere, if they had seen the untroubled countenance with which Kezia received them, counselling her deaf friend (with a graceful apology for the liberty she was assuming) on no account to suffer himself to be governed by a domestic—not even by a Druce; "and, grieved as we shall be to lose our dear Mr. Manley," she glibly wrote, "yet, sympathizing in your natural desire for change of scene, you may rely on our doing our very utmost to forward your departure. Still" (imploringly), "you must not leave us sooner than you can help. You do not know, nor, with your modest estimation of yourself, is it possible you should ever know, how very, *very* much you will be missed in this house."

He answered her only with a melancholy smile and a shake of the head. Ever since the desertion of his first and only love had so deeply mortified him, any thing like direct praise had appeared to Mr. Frere as little else than the bitterest sarcasm; and in this instance, nothing but his thorough belief in the sincerity of his hostess prevented it from being less disgusting to him than

usual. "Those excellent Divets!" Yes, he really *did* think they would be sorry to part with him.

Before Colonel Hussey took leave after this last flying visit to his beloved, the day of his wedding (which, as the bride had no home amongst her own relations, the Divets insisted should take place at Etheridge) was finally fixed. That day fortnight the Colonel's felicity was to be secured in the possession of his "sincere," his "warm-hearted," his "faithful Maria;" and the Divets' good-natured and hospitable propensities were honourably displayed by the trouble and expense they incurred, and that with the cheerfulest alacrity, to shew kindness to their kinsman, and due attention to the lady whom a doubtful fate had assigned him.

With an insight into the feelings of the deaf guest, which did credit to her penetration and tact, Mrs. Barclay hesitated to follow the hint of her less sagacious father, who counselled her to make this wedding a plea for persuading Frere to prolong his stay at Etheridge, quoting the common saying, that such things were apt to prove infectious; while his daughter, with far more delicacy of perception, doubted whether Frere's known reluctance to mixing amongst strangers, would be lessened by the purpose which was bringing this numerous assembly under their roof; the nature of the approaching festivity reminding him, as it might and must, of so much that he was longing to bury in eternal oblivion.

What feeling predominated with Maria Palliser while this question was being argued in her hearing, it is hard to say; or whether she suffered most from the hopeless

sinking of the heart with which she anticipated losing Frere for ever and ever from her sight—or from the tumultuous quickening of every pulse, which came upon her as she thought of his calm eyes being fixed upon her at the very moment she was perjuring herself at the altar. She was tempted to make it a particular request that he should not be urged to remain on this account, but had no plausible reason to give for interfering in arrangements which, up to this time, she had passively suffered the Divets to manage as they chose. To the Colonel, indeed, she ventured a murmur of dissent. “Surely the fewer the better!” but sociable himself, and highly gratified with the handsome preparations his cousins were making to do honour to him and his bride, the happy lover only praised his Maria’s retiring modesty, and insisted on his part that one spectator more or less could make but little difference even to the most bashful bride.

“Particularly,” he added, “in this instance, when that additional guest was to be such a mere cipher as poor Manley Frere;” and besides, he persisted (and Miss Palliser could not gainsay what was so obviously just), it would be hardly fair to the friends who were interesting themselves so warmly in their behalf, if they were to be cavilling at any small matter in their arrangements. “I know,” the Colonel said, a little mortification perceptible in his gentle manner—“I know that your feelings towards the Divets are not quite as cordial as I could desire—for indeed, my love, these good cousins of mine have a host of virtues to counterbalance a very few foibles: it is the only instance in which I have yet dis-

covered my dear Maria to be a little unjust—but I am sure her generous disposition must be touched by their present behaviour.”

Feeling for her lover the very gratitude he would fain have inspired towards his relations, Miss Palliser forced herself to smooth down the wrinkles on her forehead, and distend her well-cut lips with such a smile as a January sun diffuses over a fine extent of country; but it satisfied the confiding Colonel, and encouraged him to proceed a little further with this topic.

“They insist on doing every thing themselves, and will not even suffer me to send in champagne for the breakfast. And the cake, I suppose you know, is a present specially to your fair self from old Mr. Divet.” Miss Palliser tried to seem grateful; and then Colonel Hussey, lowering his voice a little, added, “But the Patriarch is to do me a still greater service, Maria—can you not guess what it is? He has volunteered to stand father at our wedding, my love, and give you to me with his own venerable hand!”

She turned her sorrowful, almost indignant, eyes upon him—“*He* stand in the place of *my* poor father!—oh, surely that need not be!”

“No—but it is very flattering. At least, Maria, it gratifies me that my old friend should exert himself to do me this kindness—the greatest, as *I* regard it, that man can confer upon me!”

Miss Palliser would not check the Colonel’s satisfaction by exhibiting further disgust at this his pet piece of news, and he went on chatting in such a pleased, con-

tented strain, that Mrs. Sarah, who was within hearing of the lovers, was led to inquire what was become of the blue devils he was complaining of so lately? “Eh, Master Benjamin, what’s come of the indigestion that was to send you tramping to the other world, bag and baggage?”

“Cured, cousin Sally!” he answered with the happiest smile in the world. “The sight of this dear girl has done more for me than all the medicines I have swallowed for the last six months.”

“Ha, I said it was all humbug!” said the old lady, continuing her walk, or rather shuffle, up and down the room. “Half a pint of camomile tea is worth the whole mess of it!” and she looked with great contempt at the little phial which the Colonel had produced from his waistcoat pocket, and which, being nearly full, he was exhibiting triumphantly as a proof of his sudden amendment.

“If I had been at Woolwich instead of my present quarters, this bottle would have been nearly finished; and, look—I have almost forgotten to take a dose since I have been here.”

“Oh, be hanged to it! Give it your sweetheart, and let her pop it out of the window for you.”

“Yes,” said Maria, offering to take the phial, “I *will* keep it for you, and, whenever you ask me for it again, I shall know that my influence over you is at an end.”

“Agreed,” replied the Colonel, delivering the medicine into her hands, and answering her sweet but melancholy smile with a look of fond assurance. “Depend on it, my

love, if that is to be the compact, the pledge will remain with you as long as I am a living man." At the same time, he continued less sentimentally, "Though you are welcome to keep the phial as a memento of the victory of Venus over Galen, it may not be amiss to take cousin Sally's advice, and empty it of its contents; for the chief ingredient of the prescription being prussic acid—Look, cousin"—he said, interrupting himself with a smile—"Look how wide Maria opens her eyes at those two little innocent words!"

"Humph!" said the other; "it's only because she finds you are more of a gander than she supposed you. Lord! to think of a sensible, middle-aged man like you, Ben Hussey, going about his business with a bottle of stuff in his pocket that would poison a horse!" and the old lady, as she stumped up and down the room (a favourite mode with her of taking exercise), kept rallying Colonel Hussey in her rough way; while Miss Palliser stood holding the little phial up to the light, and gazing curiously upon it, as Eve might have looked upon the apple when first her attention was directed toward the thing that had the power to make her wise: the rich colour which had flushed her cheek when the Colonel declared the nature of its contents, still lingering there, and causing her to look so particularly handsome, that he—fond man!—could not forbear making her a little compliment thereupon. But in the very midst of his gallantry she stopped him to ask, "How many drops of that clear, deceitful liquid he was in the habit of taking at once—twenty?" "My dear Maria!" was the answer,

“why, twenty drops would knock down a troop of horse, let alone a simple Colonel of artillery! No, six is the utmost I ever venture to take; and, spite of cousin Sally’s disapprobation, I must say that, in the absence of a better specific, it has done me more good than any thing I ever tried. So you need not be apprehensive (powerful as it is) that I am in any danger from taking it. Ah, cousin Sally! I may think myself a lucky fellow to have a dear, good girl like this taking such interest in me and my physicking.”

“Yes, that’s all very fine, Master Ben,” was the old lady’s astute rejoinder; “but you’d better not give her too much trouble with looking after you and your doctor’s stuff, for if you take to quacking yourselves, or each other, it will be the worse for you both in the end, I promise you that.”

“Never fear, never fear!” he replied cheerfully; “we know what we are about, don’t we, Maria?” But she made him no reply.

CHAPTER XIX.

AU REVOIR !

NOR long after the dialogue here detailed, Colonel Hussey took a temporary leave of Etheridge: the last departure before his final return to claim the hand of his betrothed. He went happy in the delusion which persuaded him of her firm attachment, and led him to interpret the passive composure of hopeless resignation, into the feelings of a delicate and reflecting woman contemplating the new life she was about to enter upon, in the serious strain which, to him, seemed both natural and becoming. Happy man ! we must again repeat—and most blessed state to be in ; when nothing came amiss to him, whether it might be the sly jokes of the Divets (adepts always in the sort of raillery supposed to be allowable to persons in his predicament), or the abstracted looks of the bride-elect ; all seeming right and pleasant in the sight of the good but deluded Colonel.

A very few weeks had intervened since Maria Palliser was standing on the upper step of that broad, long flight, which, after a somewhat antiquated fashion occasionally to be observed amongst the older and more respectable mansions in our country towns, gave access

to Etheridge House. A great change had been wrought in her during the slight interval ; yet, so well had she guarded her secret, that none within that house or out of it, with the exception of the one trusted correspondent, had the least suspicion of the metamorphosis. Discreditable as it must be reckoned to the penetration of the family amongst whom she sojourned, it was a fact that the keen-eyed Patriarch and his intelligent descendants were just as widely in error with regard to this fair member of their household, and their suppositions followed precisely the same common track as those of old Tufnell the head grocer of Etheridge, who, standing at his shop-door opposite, surveyed the present parting as in no respect dissimilar to that which had come under his observation on a former occasion ; or, if conclusions might be drawn from the scene before him, Miss Palliser's demeanour must have argued an increase rather than a diminution of esteem for the departing Colonel since last he took his leave.

For whereas, at the previous separation, the lady, having seen her lover's carriage in motion, had retreated with her accustomed step into the house, and had allowed the door to be shut upon the vehicle while it was yet jogging the length of the High Street, she now stood gazing after it—intently—earnestly, as it seemed to honest old Tufnell ; and, even when it had disappeared from view, her graceful form and fine eyes maintained their position, and still she lingered on the Divets' door-step. What beholder, then, ever so obtuse of fancy, but must have held it for a fact indisputable,

that those wistful eyes were reproaching the gods for snatching away her heart's best treasure? and that, so long as her fond and foolish ear might distinguish the sound of his chariot-wheels, she could not tear herself from the spot?

Utterly unconscious was Maria of the notice she was attracting amongst the Etheridge gossipred, though Tufnell was far from being sole spectator of the tender scene; though Mr. Jones's young and rakish assistant had his bold eyes fixed full upon her as he tripped past on some early errand, and Miss Dance the milliner and her old bachelor lodger were employed in precisely like manner: the former finishing her last morsel of breakfast as she looked over the blind of her little parlour, the latter, razor in hand (for he was in the very act of shaving), and still mindful of decorum, presenting the unlathered half of his chin to public view, as he peered from the folds of his window-curtain.

Miss Palliser saw nothing of all this; nor, supposing she had, would it much have disturbed her; for the town and its dependencies was to her supercilious regard but a type of the human family so commonly distasteful to her; so she turned into the house without bestowing a thought upon her audience.

A letter which the postman had that moment delivered was put into her hand; but even the lucubrations of her faithful friend Lucy Ainsworth would have failed to lead her back out of the maze of speculation, or whatever it might be called, that had kept her as a mark for the curious of the vicinity, if the contents of the

epistle had not happened to treat of the very things that absorbed her. It was written in answer to that in which Maria had not only confessed, but striven to justify, her predilection for the Divets' deaf guest. Openly proclaiming her intention of cherishing his remembrance even after her union with another, and asserting with a sort of reckless boast and a self-reliance utterly shocking to her right-minded cousin, that but for this solace of doating in memory on the last image of Frere, a life spent in the society of Colonel Hussey would be unendurable to her.

In Miss Ainsworth's haste to comment on this unholy confession, there was more than mere solicitude for an erring friend; for it struck her that some unwary expression of her own must have encouraged Maria thus to overleap all the boundaries of ordinary decency. She had been too tender—too punctilious in her occasional strictures on her cousin's questionable sentiments; or, intimate as they were, she could never have dared to put forth opinions so opposed to all ordinary rules of conduct—to every maxim of religion and morality. Miss Ainsworth had long lamented the unsettled state of mind which so frequently displayed itself in the tone of her cousin's correspondence, but had trusted that though her faith was wavering, her principles of virtue, of common integrity at least, were firmly grounded; and that, although Maria's married life might be miserable, it would still be innocent; but now, alas! after professing such an unblushing liberty of thought, how could even this be relied on? So, following what she conceived to

be a sacred duty, the startled confidante, in terms the most impressive she could devise, laid before her unhappy friend the fearful results to be apprehended from sentiments so lawless, and sophistry so weak. For Lucy refused to believe that an imagination thus urged and stimulated in the way of transgression, could long content itself with dwelling only on the memory of the past. This projected course of falsehood, this voluptuous cherishing of forbidden thoughts, what could it lead to but the gradual undermining of the plainest principles of duty to her God, her husband, and herself? and how might it be expected to end, if not in the final resignation of all that woman should hold most sacred?

Miss Ainsworth's reasoning was unassailable, her censure only too just; but the errors she combated had crept so insidiously into the undefended mind of her cousin, and had seemed to Maria so fully justified, either by her own individual character or the qualities or condition of others, that the sudden attack brought offence but no conviction. A glance was sufficient to shew her the tenor of the epistle, but she preferred being alone before making herself mistress of its whole contents.

Shortly after breakfast it was the custom of the family to disperse to their several avocations; and Maria, following the usual course, was proceeding to read the letter in her own apartment, when, perceiving that she was the last to leave the breakfast parlour, she hesitated and turned back when her foot had even crossed the threshold; for why go elsewhere when her solitude there was so entire?

or, rather—why leave the vicinity of the garden while Manley Frere was loitering amongst its shrubs and flower-beds? So she stayed behind the rest, and opening still wider the glass-door which gave upon the terrace, stood there—herself all unnoticed—dividing her eyes and her thoughts between the angry letter and him who was the cause and the subject of it.

In the cool retirement of her chamber, alone, and entirely apart from the deaf guest, her cousin's remonstrances would have had a better chance of touching her: chained to the point of the argument, her cheek might possibly have burned with more of shame than wrath, when she found herself so severely taken to task. But here, each solemn paragraph, full of reproof and warning, excited only a supercilious smile; and ever, as she finished each fresh division of the lecture, her eyes would be wandering abroad—seeking what seemed to her a living, breathing confutation of all such common truisms, such poor—such narrow-minded reasoning!

As long as Lucy Ainsworth denounced only her kinswoman's moral sentiments, or enlarged upon the injured rights of the unsuspecting Colonel Hussey, this same sneer of angry derision sufficed to mark Miss Palliser's entire yet calm opposition of opinion; but shortly the letter took another tone, and then, forsooth, the young lady's indignation began to simmer, and surge, and bubble over; for holding it, as she did, to be a most just and holy anger, she gave her feelings the freest vent, and even luxuriated in their mute expression. The passage that so excited her ran thus:—

“I infer the danger of the predilection you own to, from the strange and unnatural nature of it ; the object which has bewitched you plainly proving, that you have imbibed all the blindness as well as insanity of that species of affection which you have hitherto held so lightly, and taken such pleasure in depreciating—and that even when the attachment was of a natural and creditable sort. You must pardon me—indeed you must—for saying that this fancy of your’s is neither the one nor the other. This person, whose perfections you vaunt so eloquently, and whose image is to be carried with you to your grave, and form your only consolation—and so forth—varnish the plain fact as you please, is deficient in one of humanity’s greatest advantages ; and (forgive me again !) it must be either a perverted taste, or a heart predisposed to surrender to the first object that strikes the eye, that can attempt not merely to palliate such a glaring imperfection, but actually to prize and laud it as a peculiar charm. I could smile at such a queer instance of female delusion, if I did not in your case feel so anxious as to its probable result. Were you one of those vain and light-headed girls so commonly to be met with, I should hardly think it worth while to answer your wild declamation ; for I should trust that this odd passion would soon take a new direction, perhaps to some subject still more odd and unaccountable ; and the deaf hero might in due time give place to a blind or a lame one, regarding whose deficiencies you would be just as enthusiastic as you are about this Mr. Frere ! It would be but exchanging the ear-tube

for a pair of crutches—signs, both of them, of infirmities which we are bound to pity, but surely not to idolize ! But this is no subject for raillery. All that I have ever known of you, assures me that your feelings are capable of tenacity as well as depth ; and, while almost hopeless of convincing, I must again and again implore you to consider, coolly and rationally, the horrible dilemma in which you are placing yourself, situated as you are with regard to Mr. Frere. You say he is guiltless of any attempt to gain your affections, and for his sake it is well that it should be so ; though there would be more excuse for you if he had been less scrupulous—you, knowing the *utter impossibility* of a union with him ; and that, unless you put the strongest curb upon your heated fancy, and shun his society henceforth, instead of seeking it so sedulously, as I fear you do—your youth and all the respectability and comfort of your life will be consumed in vain wishes and fruitless repining.”

Never had a solemn and laboured address been more effectually deprived of its intended effect, by the insertion of one unlucky paragraph. All the sound sense and earnest friendship which the remonstrance embodied, were neutralized utterly by this contemptuous allusion to Frere. Maria might gather the purport of the rest of the letter, and even read it to the end ; but continually, and with ever-increasing irritation, she was recurring to the offensive sentence, and no tenderness to herself, or gentle remorse for her feelings, such as pre-

dominated in other portions of the letter, could make amends for this.

That he, the object of her heartfelt veneration, should be treated with such dishonour—his virtues doubted, merely, as it seemed, because she had magnified them—and his misfortunes sneered at in a vein of vulgar ridicule! “The meanest creature, visited as he had been by the mysterious wrath of Heaven, ought surely,” she said, “to be exempt from mockery; but he——!” and then her face, in which the softest compassion for him seemed struggling with the expression of her own wounded pride, was turned again towards that beloved form which kept her lingering there. And, as Frere slowly retreated up the garden, Maria burst into a half-muttered and most indignant ‘soliloquy, which, had it been caught indistinctly with the accompaniment of her fine person and most expressive features, might well have figured forth some prophetess of heathendom pouring out imprecations against the enemies of her false faith.

As she stood thus leaning against the garden door in her abandonment of grief and ire, yet gradually losing thought of all but him, and holding the letter with a very careless hand, she grew conscious of a gentle stress being laid upon it, and, looking down, saw Shako wagging his tail, and looking beseechingly in her face. The rustling paper had caught his attention, and, remembering the lessons of his little instructress, he was asking as plainly as a dog could express himself, to have it given up to him. Miss Palliser could not often

be reproached for acting from impetuous impulse, but the little incident tallied so curiously with her present mood of mind, that, giving way to a not uncommon mixture of feelings, a union of playfulness and spite, she held the paper aloft for Shako to jump for it, and felt a savage glee as she saw it beginning to exhibit the marks of his teeth. "That's right, Shako!" she cried, inviting him to leap still higher. "It is fit only for the jaws of a cur! Seize it, then; tear it, good dog!" and Shako, nothing loath, made one effectual spring, and, snatching the letter from her hand, danced out with it upon the terrace, shaking and mumbling it precisely as his fair friend had recommended him to do.

And at this point Miss Palliser would have had the interlude to end, for the whim was over with her—but not with Shako! He, trained to this kind of sport, and drilled by Phebe to carry to and fro exactly such missives as the one that was now between his teeth, objected strenuously to relinquishing his prize; he had it on his mind that something more was required of him than merely to give the letter back to its original owner: "Etheridge" (standing to him in the place of all England), "Etheridge expects every dog to do his duty;" and though the grown-up puppy held it no sin to loiter a little by the wayside; yet it evidently appeared that, in Shako's opinion, that duty—that obligation incumbent on cur as well as man—consisted in delivering, according to custom, the tattered scroll into the hands of his master, the usual recipient of such trifles, and of whom he

just then caught sight, turning into the shrubbery at the end of the garden.

Observing the animal prick his ears and start off in that direction, Maria was instantly aware of his purpose, and followed him with increasing anxiety; but a chase like this was only calculated to heighten Shako's amusement, and confirm him in his design. It is, indeed, *not* peculiar to the canine race to have their perception of the duties enforced upon them sharpened and improved by the prospect of a little mischief. Vainly Maria called upon his name in accents alternately of threat and entreaty. If he stopped just beyond her reach, it was only to give the paper an additional flourish, one shake the more, or a mumble extraordinary, and then to dance off with it when she thought it almost within her grasp. Her colour rose and her breath began to fail her, though less from unwonted exercise than uneasiness purely mental; for although she might argue with herself that the matter, even if it terminated as Shako plainly intended, could be of slight importance—that “of course” such a person as Mr. Frere, the very mirror of modern chivalry—so noted for high and even punctilious honour—never could such a man dream of reading a letter not addressed to himself; yet that letter was of such a nature, and it was of such vital importance to her that its contents should meet no human eye but her own—above all things, that they should be held sacred from his—that the mere thought of his glancing at the writing—of his holding it for an instant in his hand, had something in it inexpressibly indelicate and revolting.

And now Shako darted on at full speed, and, taking a short cut, vanished under the luxuriant evergreens that were planted along the entire breadth of the garden and ran parallel with its respectable old wall, forming a pleasant and secluded promenade.

Into one corner of this wall, the boundary of the premises in that direction, the former proprietors of the mansion—a race whose very name, giving place to that of the prosperous and popular Divets, was fading fast away—had inserted one of those Dutch-looking, octagonal summer-houses, which may still be seen at times abutting upon our roads and bridle-paths; erections which offer a twofold advantage to the occupier—quiet and repose—if he be studiously-minded, with the full opportunity in the meanwhile of observing whatever may be passing outside the walls: a place wherein we may “sometimes counsel take, and sometimes—tea.” Mr. Frere had early shown a liking for the tranquil spot; and Mrs. Barclay, ever mindful of his tastes, had superintended in person the dusting and garnishing of the neglected summer-house; and had strictly charged the gardener and his myrmidons to keep aloof whenever the deaf gentleman was walking up and down those precincts. In short, this portion of the premises had been so thoroughly appropriated to the use of their guest, that it had come to be christened after him the “Friar’s Walk;” and, until Phebe’s arrival among them, no biped individual ventured there to interrupt his ruminations.

Now, when Shako disappeared under the laurels and arbutus-trees which bordered this path, Miss Palliser.

seized upon the comfortable hope that he might be only crouching there, the better to demolish his plaything, puppy-like, to atoms at his leisure. But the consoling suggestion was destroyed almost as soon as formed. On arriving, half breathless, at the turning into the Friar's Walk, at the further end of which stood this summer-house, she saw the dog with—alas ! alas !—no letter nor scrap of a letter in his mouth, but leaping and frisking round his master ; while Frere, who was walking slowly in the opposite direction, had his head bent down in the attitude of one who reads, or at least essays to do so ; for still there was the possibility—Shako having scattered many a fragment by the way—that the horrible scrawl might ere this be so mangled and spoilt, as to be wholly unintelligible even to his powers of penetration.

It was Maria's immediate impulse to fly after him, and tear the paper from his hand, before he should have made any progress in its contents ; on she ran, therefore, stopping only one moment as, glowing with shame, she asked herself how—supposing but a single sentence of that letter had been comprehended by Mr. Frere—how she could ever have the face to demand it of him ? Yet still she forced herself onward, conscious that every moment's delay was increasing the risk of discovery, and that, by boldly advancing upon him before he had made out more of the mischievous lecture, her secret might still be hidden, and her reputation preserved. But the pause, short as it was, had lost her the game. She quickened her steps, but, in the meanwhile, Frere was

moving faster still. He had ceased to read ; and now, running lightly the rest of the walk, made but one spring up the steps of the summer-house, and when, exerting her utmost speed, Maria reached the door, she found it not only shut but bolted. He had locked himself in ; and, incapable as he was of distinguishing a sound unless the voice of the speaker was close at his ear, no efforts that she could devise were likely to attract his attention.

Maria felt this even while making the futile attempt—turning the lock and imploring him piteously to let her in ; she knew he could not hear her, and, even if her voice had reached him, it would now have been too late. By this time, supposing any material portion of the letter to remain uninjured, he must inevitably have become master of her secret. Her sole hope, and it was a very faint one, rested on the possibility of the writing being so mangled as to be utterly illegible ; and, before quitting the hateful spot, she made a bold attempt to discover the actual position of affairs within the summer-house.

Approaching with all the circumspection that such a manœuvre demanded, Maria crept to the nearest window and peeped cautiously—with most *exceeding* caution—round its heavy framework, till she could command a sufficient view of the interior of the Dutch-built sanctuary. She needed not to have been so guarded in her movements ; for there, at the little round table in the centre of the room, sat Frere, flattening, and smoothing, and piecing together the fragments of her letter ; which was, indeed, in a sorry condition, but which Maria's reason

assured her he would not be taking such pains to adjust, unless its contents appeared matter of peculiar interest to him. There he sat leaning over the table, and so absorbed in his base occupation, that, so far from her gentle approach running any risk of disturbing him, she verily believed that nothing less than an earthquake beneath his feet, or the voice of cousin Sally at its highest pitch, would have distracted his attention from those jagged and fluttering remnants.

Miss Palliser's humiliation required no further addition; it was surely bitter enough to atone for the sudden impulse of wrath, the childish demonstration which had afforded Frere this shameful advantage over her; yet another and a sharper pang was still to be endured before she left her post of observation. His features, as he bent over his cruel work, were only partially revealed to her; but she could not be mistaken in the expression they had assumed—the glow of exultation which suffused his countenance, the smile that curled his lip. “Cruel wretch! ungentlemanly monster! he was gloating in derision over his own triumph and her irreparable shame!”

She called on Heaven to help her in her sore distress; for, like most of those unhappy persons who employ their hours of calm reflection in questioning the very existence of a God, Maria Palliser no sooner fell into any grief or urgent difficulty, than instantly her eyes were lifted on high, and some fierce cry or murmur of impatience would be flung towards that heaven where gentle and lowly prayer was seldom wafted by her lips.

But help there was none at hand even if she had better deserved it ; and all that remained for her was to fly as fast as possible from the scene of her disgrace, shunning henceforth the sight of him who had achieved it. The day Frere had named for leaving Etheridge was now so near that there could be no difficulty in avoiding him ; and any slight plea of indisposition to account for the keeping her chamber for the rest of the week, would satisfy the Divets, who were always civilly indifferent to her and her proceedings ; indeed, she despised them all too thoroughly to concern herself about their feelings or opinions.

It was well, perhaps, for this misguided lady that her self-reproach was balanced in some measure by the glowing indignation she had conceived against Mr. Frere. Had her own weaknesses and the humiliation they had entailed upon her, formed the sole subject of her thoughts, so vehement was her emotion, so nearly verging on the abandonment of despair, that it is hard to say how, or in what fearful act, the struggle might not have ended : but in *his* manifest backsliding, and the gross dereliction of all honourable behaviour in which her own eyes had detected him, there lay such a vast and fertile ground of complaint, as proved a species of consolation to her, even in her wildest fits of remorse.

Yet once—it was in the dead of the night following that most miserable day—when her chamber-door was locked, and all the household had long been gone to rest, Miss Palliser opened a little cabinet in which she was accustomed to keep such things as she valued particularly,

or desired to guard from strange eyes—the mysterious attraction which lies in consanguinity, inducing her to preserve certain relics which had fallen into her possession at the death of her parents and other relations—old letters, which she could not quite persuade herself to burn—a few faded miniatures, and rings, and locketts, which modern taste would shudder to behold, such urns and weeping willows as they displayed to view ; for, like many old hoards, the collection lay chiefly in the funeral line ; being indeed but the refuse of better things, which, it was to be feared, had found their way to the pawnbroker's many years ago. Close by them lay some handsome trinkets presented by Colonel Hussey to his betrothed love ; these in their brightness and modern fashion standing as types of the actual present—the living, breathing world—while those poor shattered memorials of the dead, forgotten by all but the sorrowing creature whose listless eye now surveyed them, and neglected even by her, might be taken for meet emblems of the shadowy past.

And there was another offering from the affianced lover, not glittering with gold and precious stones, yet valued at a higher rate than all he had yet bestowed upon her ; but this was consigned to a less prominent compartment of the trinket-box and lay all alone, as though unfit to be associated with ornaments of pleasure or display. It happened that there had been a touch of sentiment, and a sort of playful solemnity in the Colonel's manner when he committed it into the charge of his Maria ; but had he obtained the remotest clue to the

feelings with which she received the pledge, he would as soon have thought of cutting off his good right hand as of placing that little phial of medicine in hers.

For there had been dark moments in the blighted girlhood of Maria Palliser, when heart-stricken and weary, and seldom solaced by any ray of heavenly hope, she had secretly coveted, as a treasure of great price, the very power with which he was unconsciously endowing her—some passport to eternity, swift and unerring as the lightning's stroke, which, as soon as the unlawful temptation grew too strong to be repressed, or the woes of life seemed heavier than she could endure, might enable her to glide from existence with quietness and decency; for what sentinel, meditating the desertion of his post, would desire to do so amid circumstances of hurry and tumult? Almost in the season of childhood this wish had been conceived, though the horror and odium attaching to it had prevented her from divulging her thought to any living creature; and when time had brought with it more independence of action, the fear of being detected in any unsuccessful attempt towards the attainment of such a fearful acquisition, had effectually deterred her from making it. The daring mind which higher motives were inadequate to restrain, might thus have been held in perpetual restraint, but for the blind interposition of another.

Miss Palliser's original tendencies, fostered in course of time by the almost pagan philosophy of her uncle, had by no means excluded the apprehension of some overruling influence, shaping in silence and mystery the

course of human affairs: vague and unsettled was the idea, a misty perception more than an actual belief; but if ever in her life this notion could be said to prevail and stand out as a living conviction, it was when her secret will was accomplished, voluntary and cheerfully, by the last person in the world from whom she could reasonably have anticipated its fulfilment.

Many a time she had pondered upon the like inscrutable subjects; but never before with such a keen sense of personal interest in them, as now that she looked—not without a shudder—upon that pale liquid, lying clear and cold in its crystal cell, and asked herself the tremendous question, whether its mere presence there, thrust as it had been into her possession by no effort of her own, might not be interpreted as a positive permission, and an intimation of her unfettered power to use it in whatever way should seem best to her human wisdom.

Often rejecting the only true oracles of divine knowledge—often and earnestly had Maria Palliser invoked the presence of some unearthly messenger, trusting, in the weakness and wildness of her rebel heart, that if indeed “one rose from the dead” to enlighten her, she must needs believe his teaching; but never had she felt this longing so intensely, or looked with such a fixed and half-expectant gaze into the mists and shadows of night, or hearkened to the lightest sound with such a watchful ear. Her joyless love, together with the confusion and agony it had brought upon her, became for the moment a thing remote and dim, while in spirit she was pressing

far beyond earth's limits, and the interests which agitate the children of the soil; though, whether that rash spirit were wandering in the realms of light or darkness, none less than her benighted self could say.

It would have fared better with her if, when the possession she so carefully treasured was hidden again from mortal eyes, she had still preserved her deep impression of the vanity of all human pursuits and passions; but this would have argued a more healthy tone than was to be attained by her unbridled nature. Her old emotions came thronging in upon her solitude long before the rising of the morrow's sun, causing her to wonder (the feeling was not unmingled with self-contempt), that, having the power to free herself from her wretched position, she should still shrink from taking the final step.

A sullen composure was all Maria could command herself to put on, when it became necessary to reply to the courteous inquiries which the ladies of the family thought it incumbent to make regarding the state of her health; cousin Sally, with her hearty manner, her strong recommendation of camomile tea, and threats of writing to the Colonel, being much the most difficult to deal with.

Nothing had been more repugnant to Miss Palliser than the idea of meeting Mr. Frere again face to face; and yet, before the close of her second day's seclusion, she saw reason (or imagined she perceived it) to alter her line of conduct towards that gentleman: for a change—unaccountable to all but herself—appeared to have taken place in his intentions, and it began to be

rumoured in the house that the deaf guest, whose departure had been fixed so peremptorily for the first day in the ensuing week, was now contemplating a longer residence at Etheridge House. As yet, indeed, Frere had given no formal notice of his change of mind, and the report had reached the Divets' only through the medium of his man, Druce ; but the intelligence was so welcome to the household generally, that a much less competent authority would have been listened to with ready attention, and every disposition to rely upon his statement.

Though delivered with something of mystery—for the colloquy with Divet and his eldest daughter was carried on upon the common staircase, where Druce happened to encounter them—nothing could be clearer than the evidence. That morning, when referred to concerning a patent lock for his writing-case, and various travelling requisites, Mr. Frere had told his valet not to be in any hurry about the things, as it was by no means unlikely that his journey would be postponed.

As for his reasons for this sudden change of purpose, the candid Druce professed himself quite incompetent to speak ; “ but said he could not help connecting it in some way with a letter which his master had been busy writing the best part of yesterday in the afternoon.”

“ Ah, to some of those Girdlestones, I'll lay my life ! ” said Divet, growing red at the idea. “ I've a sort of presentiment that those people are in the neighbourhood ; the father, I know, was at the Seabrights' a day or two ago, and the girl herself, very likely—*very* likely indeed

—nothing more so ! And if any correspondence is renewed between them, no doubt *my* house will be highly convenient to him as a further residence. Oh ! the thing is as plain as it can be. God bless me ! I see through it all ; don't you, Kezia ? Eh, Mrs. George, I penetrate the whole mystery of it ; don't you, my dear ? Why, the affair may have been going on, and he riding over to Langton every day for the last fortnight. Who knows ? ”

“ *I* know, sir,” replied Druce, with cool decision. “ I have ascertained that his exercise has *not* been taken in that direction, for I questioned his groom upon the very point ; and Bob is such a born idiot, that he is always sure to tell me the truth, without any manner of reserve.”

“ And were you such an idiot yourself as to omit learning the direction of that letter when you took it to the post ? ” inquired David testily.

“ I did *not* take it to the post ! ” was the reply given with emphatic solemnity. “ Mr. Frere took it himself—the only time within my experience that he has done such a thing. But yesterday he declined putting it as usual into my care, and walked with it himself to the post-office, as if it was something of too much consequence to be trusted even to me. But his manner,” continued Druce—“ his manner of writing it would have convinced me of that. He did not go on with it in his usual collected style, but was continually throwing down his pen, and walking up and down the room between whiles, deep in thought ; and all this blessed day I have had more trouble to make him understand me than I ever

had before. I'm confident his mind is running upon something very particular."

"And you are sure he really *did* post that letter?" inquired Mrs. George thoughtfully—"Quite certain that it was not despatched somewhere by a messenger?"

"Quite sure, for I followed him at a distance to ascertain the fact."

"Well, it is queer enough," was Divet's rejoinder. "But young men are capricious chaps, especially when they have cash enough to indulge all their vagaries."

"I am quite aware of that, sir," said Druce. "I never had the honour of serving any gentleman of independent fortune (which is the line I am best pleased to adopt) who knew his own mind for two days together; always excepting Mr. F. I look upon *him* as a singular—I will venture to say a *remarkable*—exception. And if he is changing his mind and altering his intentions without any reason for it, I don't scruple to assure you that it will be the first time he has done so under my observation"—and, waiving further conference with David, whose shallowness of judgment Mr. Druce had fathomed long ago, he bowed respectfully to Mrs. Barclay and went upon his way.

Whatever might be the inducement for a vacillation so unusual to Mr. Frere's general habits, that he was pronounced by his experienced valet to be a phenomenon of stability amongst the race of rich young bachelors, the result could not but prove highly satisfactory to his hospitable entertainers: all of whom had been more or less crestfallen as the day of his departure drew near.

But that which raised the fainting hopes of the Divets, had a very different effect on Maria Palliser.

Frere's change of purpose followed so closely upon the adventure in the garden, that it was impossible for her to doubt that in that most lamentable betrayal of her secret sentiments lay the ruling motive for his seeming caprice: *she* was the attraction which detained him at the manor-house. Yet much as she would once have rejoiced at finding that she—the uninteresting, neglected Maria—possessed any sort of power over the thoughts and movements of Manley Frere, the conviction of her influence brought with it now neither pride nor pleasure. His views in remaining at Etheridge must be as mortifying to her as they were destructive of the high opinion she had formed of his honour and strict integrity; for, being aware of her weakness towards him as well as of her solemn engagement elsewhere, a person only gifted with the noble qualities she had imputed to Mr. Frere, would have hastened instead of delaying his journey, and have done his utmost to remove for ever from her the dangerous delight of his presence.

To have reconciled his character with the image her fancy had adorned with such bright and delusive colours, his feelings on becoming master of her wretched secret should have been those only of regret and compassion. He must, as a man of severe principle, have censured her for loving even himself, her vows being pledged to another; but wise, and tender, and incapable of exulting in the degradation of a helpless woman, though her disgrace

might minister food for his own vanity, he would well have weighed her temptations, and his pity would have been as pure and free from earthly stain, as that of some superior intelligence looking down from an inaccessible height on the trials and frailties of the children of men. How opposite to all this was his real character ! and how base the purpose which was impelling him to linger still in her neighbourhood ! The smile of mischievous gratification which his face had exhibited when she last beheld it, had haunted her memory ever since ; and it afforded too good a clue, alas ! to his present conduct. His intention in continuing at the house could only be to enjoy his triumph over her, and amuse himself at her expense, by playing upon her heart-strings as upon the wires of some pleasant yet insignificant instrument of music.

She could not answer for it that his unprincipled designs might not go further still ; he might be desiring so to enslave her, that she should crown his victory and perfect her own ruin, by renouncing her engagement with the ill-used Colonel Hussey.

She pondered upon this idea till it inflamed her resentment, and endued her with resolution to vindicate her character as far as was yet possible, and to meet his unmanly attack, in whatever manner it might be attempted, with firmness and dignity. If her heart should break before the struggle was ended, so much the better for her ; but at least she would force him to respect her for her future conduct, however he might despise her on account of the past.

She made known her intention, therefore, of descending from her present retirement, but *not* at the hour of dinner ; for her place at table was opposite that of the deaf guest, and she could not prevail upon herself to make all at once such a trial of her fortitude as she knew it would be to sit for an hour with his impertinent glances levelled full upon her.

Mrs. George heard the announcement with her usual complacent courtesy, congratulating Miss Palliser on her sudden convalescence, and themselves on having her company at a little party they were contemplating bringing together that evening—"A trifling affair—quite a friendly meeting of some of their good friends in the town, got up rather in a hurry to please dear Phebe, who had not been in the very best spirits lately. Even if Miss Palliser objected to taking any active share in the entertainments of the evening, the sort of thing would serve to amuse her for an hour or two, and she might retire whenever she was so disposed."

The preparations for an evening party which greeted Miss Palliser, as she quitted her retirement for the regions below, demanded no previous explanation ; for, lo ! a vision of Betty might be seen, ministering to certain muffled fair ones in the cloak-room, who, the night being fine, and the distance short, had walked to the friendly meeting in a friendly way. And in the hall was their cavalier awaiting them, ready when they should issue forth, to present an arm to his two elder sisters in gauze and satin array, while the youngest from school walked demurely in their rear, clad in the

simple white muslin which is so emblematical of that guileless innocence ever inseparable to young ladies undergoing the educational process.

Our brother, while he loiters in attendance, has a slight preparation to make on his own account, and is diligently running his fingers through his hair, shaking his dress pocket-handkerchief out of its folds, and, with the help of a footman, whisking the dust off his polished shoes with the silk one common to work-days. Unerring signs are these of the recurrence of one of the small and unpremeditated entertainments which the Divets had been much in the habit of giving ; and for which, indeed, the old manor-house, reviving under their liberal housekeeping and social propensities from its previous inhospitable reputation, had become famous in the town and its immediate vicinity.

These meetings, which were conducted in a spirit of cordial liberality, such as better people than the Divets would do well to imitate, had only of late been discontinued in deference to the inclinations of their deaf guest ; whose reluctance to mixing much with strangers induced him to retire whenever these festivities were afoot. Even on occasions of much higher solemnity, it was customary with Frere to shew himself only for just such a space of time as served to satisfy the claims of politeness and the declared wishes of his kind hosts. Under the head of "higher solemnities," we refer to those melancholy events in the country called "dinner-parties," when the Divets had out all their best plate

and finest wines (and a goodly stock there was of both), and succeeded, spite of their position as townsfolk and new-comers, in convening some even of the great county families—denizens of that world beyond the “pikes,” from the countenance and awful society of which Etheridge, with few exceptions, found itself relentlessly excluded.

Therefore it was that Maria had reckoned securely, and with a feeling of great relief, on escaping that night the sight of Manley Frere; having no doubt that he would, according to his established custom, take the opportunity of shutting himself, with his books and papers, in some remote quarter of the roomy old mansion—some snug nook, sacred to peace and quiet, where little Phebe would bring him his tea, and stay with him probably while he drank it, talking away so fast with her nice little fingers, and telling him such funny stories about all the good people below.

But it came to pass that on this night Mr. Frere broke through his previous habit, and, instead of shunning society as a thing intolerable to him, he presented himself voluntarily amongst the company; so that amongst the first whom Maria’s eyes encountered in the drawing-room was he—not shrinking mute and melancholy in a corner, but the centre of a group composed of the most elderly and dignified of the party, who were exerting their politest endeavours to make him hear and understand; he seconding their well-meant efforts meanwhile with such tact and discretion, that when the colloquy broke up, each of its contributors was left im-

pressed with a complacent notion that he or she had been particularly successful in conversing with the Divets' deaf friend, and conveying to him without mistake their individual sentiments on the topics most in vogue about that time in the Etheridge circles ; viz., the state of the weather and the crops—the scarcity of servants, and the increase of Shanghai fowls—the chances of a war—an approaching election for town-clerk—the disease in potatoes, and the probable annihilation of the Ottoman empire.

Miss Palliser had not been many minutes in the room before she became aware of having attracted the notice of Frere ; and while he was seeking to extricate himself without abruptness from the little circle which hemmed him in, that he might cross the room to speak to her, she had time to marvel how the greeting would be performed. “ Would he be offensively particular, or too marked in his efforts to seem unconscious ? ” In either case she trusted that her own guarded manner, and the coolness of her self-possession, would suffice to check every indication of presumption that he might be tempted to display.

Yes, it was a hard task to preserve her displeasure in all its wholesome freshness, when the destroyer of her peace—the ravisher of her heart's most inmost secret—came thus unexpectedly upon her sight ; with an aspect, too, so unlike—and, alas ! so immeasurably superior—to all who were in his company—so distinct in person, voice, and movement, that he seemed to belong to quite a separate species. Then did her judgment of his late

conduct begin to waver, her very perception of right and wrong to grow dim and uncertain ; and her former prepossessions, like a flight of gentle, timid birds that had been rudely scared away for a season, and yet were ever hovering near, came circling and fluttering back to nestle in their own warm home again !

Nor in Mr. Frere's mode of approaching her could Maria find any thing to reanimate her anger against him ; for never, even when her secret was buried deepest in her bosom—never had he addressed her with a more profound and apparently unaffected respect. From his manner, the strictest observer could not have divined a trace of what was necessarily passing through his mind. He inquired after her health, and lamented her absence from the family circle, with a solicitude as properly polite, and to all appearance as unconscious, as if the source of her feigned indisposition had really been unguessed by him. Indeed she believed he could not have conducted himself with an air so easy and unembarrassed, unless he had concluded her entirely ignorant of the share he had taken in Shako's transgression. The assurance of this brought balm to her wounded pride ; and at all events one thing was evident, that had she been his own sister, or the most honoured of his female friends, he could not have evinced a consideration for her feelings more delicate and reverent in its expression. Most deeply was she touched by this behaviour ; for, in the gradual restoration of his character to its old position in her regard, she saw her own rescued from the dishonour which had seemed to her all but inevitable. That Frere possessed her

miserable secret, was a reflection to torture and humble her to the end of her existence ; but then how consolatory the thought that, though for a moment he had been seduced into taking an unfair advantage of her imprudent conduct, his noble nature was incapable of exulting in her fall, or of betraying her a step farther !

It was fortunate for Maria Palliser that the mere motion of her lips sufficed to reciprocate Mr. Frere's civilities ; for, with all these agitating circumstances weighing upon her mind, she could never have answered him coherently. So conscious was she of a secret but entire understanding between them really subsisting, though never perhaps to be acknowledged, that it struck her as if there must be some covert meaning in an observation of Mrs. Sarah's.

"It does my heart good," the old lady said, "to see Mr. Manley getting rid of all his lackadaisicals. I've never seen him so comfortable as he is to-night, poor dear soul ! But I told you all along how it would be with him. A sensible young fellow, such as him, is not to be moping and humgrumpeting all his life long on account of a good-for-nothing puss like that Miss What's-her-name ! No, no—you'll see ! He'll get him another wife in a jiffy, and that minx may go whistle for her old sweetheart."

Cousin Sally was not singular in her perception of Frere's sudden improvement. Maria heard it enlarged upon by others of the company who knew him less intimately ; and, as her eyes followed the deaf guest about the room, the conviction forced itself on her also, that he was not what he had been hitherto. She had occa-

sionally seen him display a charming vivacity, but then it had been so transitory ; and sometimes, when his spirits rose higher than usual, a shadow would seem to pass across him ; and, as if in penance for his temporary oblivion of the past and of the sorrow that must cling to him while life endured, these gleams of unwonted cheerfulness were commonly balanced by intervals of deeper gravity and more intense abstraction.

But on this night, Maria greatly erred if there was not something more than ordinary in his manner and expression : a free and lofty spirit waiting upon all his words and movements, and unchecked by any after-thought. Whether he might be silently surveying the company, or speaking to his particular acquaintances, or accepting (with what to her fond fancy seemed ever a grace peculiar to himself) the tiresome and obtrusive attentions that were often forced upon him, his cheerfulness never flagged ; and, though the evening was wearing on apace, still he shewed no signs of weariness, or any desire to escape from a position usually so distasteful to him. What could it mean ? Might it be presumed that she—that she herself——But no, no ! that was impossible : such a thought must be driven from her instantly ; there was folly in the mere suggestion. Yet how strange it was, that from time to time he would be singling her out from all the rest—her, the cold and unenticing Maria Palliser—as the object of his special notice ; even passing Phebe Divet with only a word or a smile, that he might remain for minutes together conversing with her ! He had never, before

this night, shewn her more than ordinary attention ; and he was not one to act unguardedly, or without due consideration for her as well as himself. Oh, if she could but read his thoughts !

It would seem as if the power of enjoyment was not to be limited that evening to the deaf guest, but agreeably diffused throughout the whole assembly. The Divets, noted for their admirable tact in arranging a party of this description, had never exercised the talent with more facility to themselves or satisfaction to their neighbours. The good company at large might fancy that it was simply the value of *their* society, and a due appreciation of *their* companionable qualities, which, on that particular occasion, caused such a halo of buoyant glee to radiate round their host and his hospitable family ; even enlivening the widow in her weeds : and let them enjoy their innocent mistake ! But we know better : we know that though David and his daughters would, under most circumstances, have been glad to see the Browns and the Baileys—would have put up with all the five Andersons as matters of course—and done what they could to make the Pennefathers comfortable ; yet now—all thanks to Mr. Druce for his seasonable hint—there was a special reason for their easy gaiety and smiles of universal benevolence.

Where hope and desire anchor on such a goodly foundation of self-conceit as possessed all the inmates of the Etheridge manor-house, it is no difficult matter to resume a flattering train of speculation, interrupted for a time but never entirely resigned. And now, while paying close attention to the ostensible business of the

night, setting the old to cards and the young to an extempore dance on the carpet, they ventured among themselves upon many an old joke, laid aside for the nonce: shy allusions to matters appertaining, not to Etheridge society and habits—for what had that, Lord help them! to do with court trains and family jewels?—but to a subject so inspiring to those who comprehended the jest referring to it, that it ensured the degree of unaffected good-humour which is indispensable to the success of a party like this.

The festivity of the evening was at its highest, when Mr. Frere discovered a preference for Miss Palliser's society, which even her diffidence could not but construe as something most marked and conclusive.

Observing that Phebe Divet left the dance for some special purpose, Maria soon gathered from her persuasive gestures that she was offering to play chess with the deaf guest; he however declined her proposal, saying she could not suppose he would chain her to the chess-board when all the while her heart was in the dance.

“And what do you know about my heart and all its naughty propensities?” she asked him, speaking with her fingers, and accompanying their rapid play with one of her archest glances.

“More than you think of, perhaps”—was his answer; but it was spoken too softly to reach Maria, especially as she was ignorant of the previous question: she only remarked that, turning his attention from Miss Divet to herself, he said aloud, “Miss Palliser, I am aware, never dances—perhaps *she* will take compassion upon me?”

Phebe, declaring that that arrangment would suit all parties, helped to draw the chess-table into the corner where Miss Palliser was sitting; and then tripped off, with another sparkle of her black eyes at Frere, not sorry (spite of Old Court and the family diamonds) to rejoin her gay young partner, Mr. Moss.

Maria's hands shook as she attempted to place the men; and as Frere, after a very few moves, began talking, she might well be excused for suspecting that the game was but a subterfuge for engrossing her wholly to himself.

And undoubtedly it *did* seem as if this chess-playing was little more than a pretence on either side;—the one, so absent in mind that he often forgot to move, the other scarcely distinguishing the pieces before her eyes.

Again Frere adverted to Miss Palliser's dislike of dancing. Probably it was in consideration of this declared antipathy that Mr. Frere had placed her chair with its back to the dancers, while his own seat commanded a view of them—"I remember," he said, "your once observing that you were never so forcibly convinced of the great doctrine of the fall of man, as when you saw any of the sons of Adam performing *cavalier seul* in a quadrille—Do you recollect saying so?" he asked her with a smile.

Maria did recollect the observation, and remembered also, that when she had written it she was half afraid to show it to him, lest he should think it bordering on irreverence; and now, to have him recalling the trifling

remark with a kind of arch approval, flattered as much as it surprised her.

Her spirits were rising fast, when the sight of Shako across the chess-table acted upon them like the death's head at a banqueting board, arresting her fancy in its upward flight, and reminding her of her mortality. He had his front paws resting on his master's knee; and, though nothing could be more common than to see them exchanging caresses in this position, yet just now the action of Mr. Frere's fingers, as he smoothed and patted the head of his dog, suggested some awkward recollections that the Colonel's mistress would fain—fain have forgotten!

"And so you object to dancing?" Frere went on, playing with the shaggy ears of his favourite, while his eyes dreamily followed the performance of the young people; "upon moral grounds, or only as a question of taste?"

Steadying her hand, though not without an effort, Maria wrote upon the tablets he had put before her, telling him, "her objection to the exercise rested solely on its inelegance as ordinarily practised. The word dancing signified to her the highest excellence and propriety of motion; and she could not therefore but esteem it a proof of human blindness and presumption, when she observed the total absence of grace and dignity which characterised so many of its votaries; each dancer ready to criticise his neighbour, and all so self-satisfied!"

"Why, this is the very cream of morality," he said, reading what she had written, "to be deducing a grave

lesson from a scene like this, and shewing up the prevalence of sin and sorrow from the blunders of a gallopade : extracting sermons from stones is a trifle compared to it. And so, supposing man to be a faultless creature, your creed would have it that he must of necessity be perfect in his steps—the stricter in his morals the firmer upon his toes : but are you prepared for the converse of your position ? It is acknowledged that the finest of attitudes and nimblest of feet are displayed on the boards of the opera-house. Do you really think that all the perfections under heaven are to be looked for behind its scenes ? How many a pious scruple would be quieted by such a theory ! In applauding a *pas seul* we should be satisfied that we were doing homage to the heroic qualities of the soul, while we recognized the modest household virtues shared with equal certainty amongst the *corps de ballet* !”

“ You press me hard,” she answered him ; “ yet if I were not half-bewildered by that jingling piano and the incessant hum of voices, I might find something to say in defence of my theory, ridiculously as you have defined it. For what is it but that union of goodness and beauty which ought to be inseparable, and which surely, must have been originally ?”

“ Ah !” said he, as he looked over her reply ; “ and so the piano jingles, does it ? I don’t know why, but I suspected as much. Well, I ought not to be hard upon you ; for what you seem to feel at the sight of inferior dancing, I have often suffered from the sort of music that is probably vexing your ears at this very moment.

Yet much as I have chafed under such an infliction, you must allow me to say," he added smiling, "that while I condemned the performance, I did not consequently impute any of the seven deadly sins to the players, or think myself their superior in the qualities of the heart, because a finer ear or a more cultivated taste enabled me to criticise them."

Warming with her subject, and in her new-born confidence losing sight of the old reserve which had hitherto interposed such a barrier between them, her pencil moved rapidly in reply. "Yet, after all, you *were* better than these people, morally no less than intellectually; for surely those who assume a reputation beyond their merits, and set up for proficiency in any art whose rudiments they have scarcely mastered—what are they but impostors—on a small scale perhaps—but still hypocrites at heart? While you, with all the real skill they were pretending to, and yet with too much amiability to expose their folly, must be held the superior character in heart as well as understanding."

She waited for his reply; but, a little to Maria's disappointment, Mr. Frere did not seem disposed to carry on the argument. Even while she was writing he had sunk into a musing fit; and, when roused from it to read her remarks, merely answered that they were too personally obliging to be combated any further by him.

"And I am afraid," he said, as his eyes surveyed the dancers with an indulgent smile—"I am really afraid your opinion of my taste, at least, will be sadly lowered when I confess to deriving a certain amount of pleasure

from looking on at a scene like this ; for, after all, there are one or two of the group whom it is by no means disagreeable to look upon. The fact is—(I beg your pardon, I believe you are to move next)—the fact is, that though the eye is really as susceptible of a refined enjoyment in beholding a series of graceful movements as the ear is charmed in detecting harmonies and modulations, the associations connected with the two acquirements are so different that we cease to regard them as equals—(I shall take that knight unless you guard it.) Even the lowest sort of music lays claim to a something of sentiment ; but honest dancing—at least, as it is exhibited in a drawing-room—makes no pretension of the kind. Good-humour and sociability are its characteristics ; and I for one am disposed to pardon a little awkwardness and harmless vanity, if these can be maintained. We will allow yours to be the most exalted feeling, but is not mine the happiest ? ”

“ Truly is it ! ” she answered, struck with the sweetness of his expression. “ Happier—better—nobler in every respect ! For your power of extracting pleasure from that which only irritates me, declares a soul so much at peace with itself, with heaven, and all the earth, that it can rise calm and unmoved by the follies and falsities that meet us in this hollow world at every turning ”——

Here the hand hesitated—the pencil paused ! Was it allowable to praise him so openly ? It was, indeed, her most sincere opinion ; but not for the world would she have him think her forward, or transgressing

any rule of propriety. So with a doubtful air, and a little blush, she was preparing to draw her pencil across the words, when Frere, apprehending her purpose, interposed, saying with some eagerness—

“No, no! don’t rub it out! Don’t destroy any thing you have written! Suffer me for once to read something flowing straight from the heart to the pen. Can you not fancy, Miss Palliser, that it is one of the trials—the disadvantages peculiar to my infirmity—that almost all who address themselves particularly to me, wear unintentionally a sort of moral mask? The very time they have for thinking, as they write, how they may best express themselves so as to enlighten my limited faculties, trammels their ideas, and too often renders the expression of them forced or affected. I assure you,” he added, less seriously, “an error in grammar, or a word misspelt, is a comfort and a cordial to me, as evincing a free and perfectly unpremeditated style.”

Thus urged, how could she refuse to give him any thing he might ask for? The tablets were quietly resigned into his hands; yet, ever diffident and mistrustful of herself where Frere was concerned, Miss Palliser narrowly observed the expression with which he read what she had written—perhaps with more haste than discretion. Alas! he was so used to adulation at that house, that *her* praise—*her* poor mite of approbation—must seem to him as a thing of course; for all he did, as his eye glanced rapidly over her penmanship, was to laugh a little, and look very much amused.

“And so,” he said, “because I like dancing better

than you, you infer that I must have a mind devoid of care, and a conscience at peace with all the world? How do you know that I may not be the victim of remorse at this very moment, and only abstaining from the pleasure of checkmating you, by way of atonement for some great social sin recently committed? Eh, Shako, my little man !” and he looked down at his dog with just such a light smile and impertinent significance as recalled to Maria’s remembrance the scene in the summer-house in all its atrocity.

The effect this had upon her—the sudden revulsion from rising hopes and a dawning of the spirits, quite unknown to her till that evening, to disappointment and mortification—caused Miss Pallisser to turn so pale and look so woebegone, that Frere, observing it, asked her if she was ill? “You are doing too much,” he said, “and are not sufficiently recovered for a hot room like this.” Then rising, he offered his arm to lead her away. Maria obeyed him like a child, for the solicitude of his manner had softened her once more. To see herself an object of interest to Manley Frere! She might have dreamt of such a thing, but little thought to have the fancy realized !

He took her into the hall, perhaps intending—for so she afterwards suspected—that they should remain conversing in the cooler atmosphere ; but her heart was too full : these rapid alternations were more than she could bear with outward calmness—had she stayed longer with him, she believed she must have wept outright.

With a gentle adieu on his side, therefore, and on hers

a glance almost of veneration (so soon was her short-lived anger laid at rest), they parted at the foot of the stairs; yet once, venturing to turn her eyes as she slowly ascended, she saw him leaning on the banisters, and looking after her with a countenance of mournful—yet, as she read it, of tender—concern. Their eyes meeting, he waved her a last “good-night;” and she, pressing her hand upon her heart to still its beating, went to her chamber—but not to rest!

If a shade of doubt had clung to and embittered the brightest moments of the evening, it was by this time all dispelled; for she could put no other interpretation on the conduct or intentions of Frere than what was most flattering and decisive.

She had quitted that room in agonies of shame and humiliation; forcing herself into his society only from a stubborn resolution of daring the worst, and braving his secret scorn or open impertinence; but instead of presuming on what had passed, or turning from her altogether as a light and capricious wanton, his whole manner had been such as to convince her that she had touched his feelings, and perhaps his heart.

For, honourable as she believed Manley Frere, and most incapable of playing with affections he never dreamed of returning, Maria was confident he would not (being master of her secret) have distinguished her with such marked yet respectful attention, unless he had been prepared to reciprocate her esteem, and extricate her from that dreadful engagement, the thought of which lay so heavily on her conscience. Alone and unsup-

ported, she could never have attempted this great step ! Her sense of justice, and still more the friendship and sincere respect she felt towards Colonel Hussey, would have kept her outwardly faithful to him. But Mr. Frere's whole deportment, since reading that letter of Lucy Ainsworth's, proved that he had formed a very different opinion respecting her position—its duties and its difficulties ; for, had he held them to be half as solemn and insurmountable as they seemed to her, it was not in the nature of things that he could be so unusually gay, and preserve in his manner to herself such an encouraging expression. Still, the opposite views which each might be disposed to take of social obligations—such as bound, or seemed to bind, her to the Colonel—neither staggered nor disheartened her. For was it not natural and right, she argued, that Frere—her superior in all respects : in the qualities of the heart no less than those of the understanding ; uninfected by prejudice, unswayed by self-deceit—was it not evident that he must penetrate and resolve every intricate question of morals or conduct, with a clearer, juster, and firmer capacity than ever enlightened her ?

To her weak, irresolute mind, the dissolving a contract incurred voluntarily and with an object wholly unexceptionable, did appear to be a measure most harsh and ungrateful ; and to Mr. Frere, who had in his own person suffered so much from the perjury of his first love, it might have been expected to wear the same character ; but he probably—and surely most reasonably—decided, that in winning her from the man she could

not love, he was actually doing that man a far more essential service, than by giving her up to him without a struggle. On purely moral grounds, and as an act of the highest charity, who would not desire to save the excellent Colonel Hussey from the curse of possessing a reluctant bride? The world in general, and Lucy Ainsworth at the head of the narrow-minded and undiscerning, would condemn such reasoning, and perhaps shun her society; but with the world, Maria had never cared to have communion, and the cousin Lucy, once so esteemed and trusted, was nothing to her now: another had usurped her place as friend and counsellor, and to that dear successor, so worthy of her love and confidence, she would trust herself and her poor deserted lover. He, if any one in the world could do it, would soften the impending blow, and convince Colonel Hussey that he could never, never be happy in a union with her, and that really all was for the best. Nay, elated and inspired by the events of the evening, Maria began to indulge a hope that something might already have been accomplished towards this desirable conclusion.

She remembered now what, in her previous perturbation, had passed almost unnoticed—some gossip amongst the Divets, relating to a letter which Druce had described his master as composing with a most unusual amount of care and consideration. Nothing more could she recall concerning it; but now Maria was struck by the idea, that that letter might have been addressed to Colonel Hussey: Frere taking upon himself to break the news to her affianced bridegroom, and acquainting him

(as the motive and excuse for his interference with his affairs) with the extraordinary incident which had revealed to him a secret of such infinite consequence to all concerned.

The longer Maria thought the matter over, the more natural it seemed to her that Frere would act thus, and wait till he had enlightened and (if possible) conciliated the Colonel before seeking an explanation with herself. The morrow, therefore—Heavens ! what might not that morrow bring ? From Colonel Hussey the formal resignation of her hand, accompanied—at least she hoped so—with a gentle forgiveness for the wrongs he had so innocently suffered ; and from Frere himself—ah ! could it be doubted that, having accomplished so much to level every impediment in their path, he should pause there, or delay a declaration which he knew full well would make her the happiest of human beings ?

Thus assumed and reasoned one of the fairest of the inmates of the Etheridge manor-house as she veiled her sleepless eyes in darkness ; and the little Divet also, before she extinguished her candle that night, had not only herself indulged in some very pleasing visions touching Old Court and its deaf proprietor, but had caused her anxious friends to participate largely in all her expectations of approaching grandeur.

For Phebe, ever susceptible of the least change in Frere's conduct, had been aware of something in his manner towards her—a quiet observance, and an earnestness of look and speech—which, in the midst of all his good-nature and indulgence, had ever till that night

been wanting to distinguish the lover from the friend. The symptoms were hard to be defined; yet they convinced the precocious little person that the prize she had toiled for was almost within her grasp. And so she sank into a most comfortable slumber, and awoke the next morning refreshed in spirit and complexion, and eager to renew her endeavours.

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